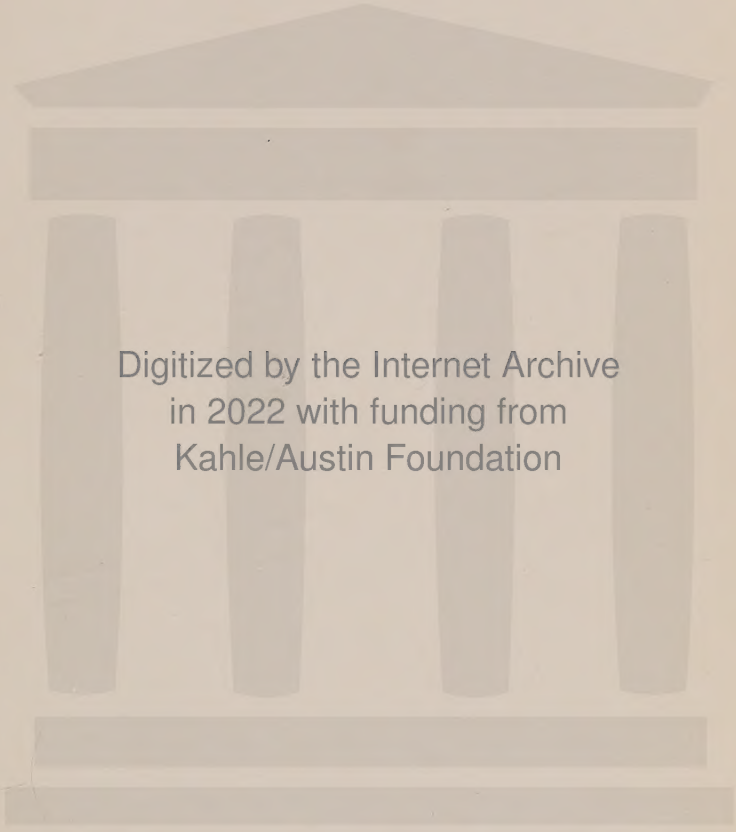
MILLS COLLEGE

LIBRARY

ART DEPARTMENT


Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2022 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

https://archive.org/details/christchildinart0000henr

13969

THE MADONNA DEL GRAN' DUCA — RAPHAEL

THE CHRIST-CHILD IN ART

A Study of Interpretation

BY

HENRY VAN DYKE

Could every time-worn heart but see Thee once again
A happy human child among the homes of men,
The age of doubt would pass—the vision of Thy face
Would silently restore the childhood of the race.

ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
1894

Mills College Library
Withdrawn

Copyright, 1893, by HARPER & BROTHERS.

All rights reserved.

754
L345

TO

ELLEN

ON WHOSE FACE I HAVE SEEN
THE BEAUTIFUL LIGHT OF MOTHERHOOD
SHINING ABOVE THE INNOCENCE AND TRUST
OF CHILDHOOD IN HER ARMS

I Dedicate this Book

GRATEFULLY

ART DEPARTMENT

PREFACE

If it were possible for the writer of this book to talk for a little while with those who are about to read it, he would not wander from his opportunity by trying to excuse its shortcomings. His chief desire and endeavour would be simply to express the spirit of what is written here in such a way that it might appear from the beginning in a true light, and with its own personal character. In effect, he would try to create an understanding between the book and its readers, feeling quite sure that they would give it fair judgment, provided only they did not take it at the outset for something else than what it is meant to be.

It is likely that he would wish to say something a little different to each one of them. For the fault of a written Preface is that it remains always the same. It has no faculty of accommodation. To accomplish its design perfectly it should have the power of change, in order to adapt itself to the delicate work of opening a real communication between one mind and another. The ideal book would have a separate introduction to every reader. But, after all, there would probably be a good deal of the same substance, though uttered with a different accent and emphasis, in each of the addresses. Certain things would always need to be said as briefly and as clearly as possible. And if the opportunity could come to the present writer, or—since that is hardly possible in a world where we must do all our work under strict limitations—if he might have the good-fortune to find gen-

tle readers who would be willing to take a Preface neither as an advertisement nor as an apology, but simply as an elucidating word, a key-note, he would desire to say, at least, something like this:

The story of the birth and childhood of Jesus the Christ, told with such wonderful simplicity and purity in the gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke, has made a most profound impression upon the heart of the world. It has exercised a silent, potent influence not only upon human thought, but also and still more deeply upon human feeling and action. It has created new ideals of taste and of conduct; new forms of grace and beauty; yes, we may even say that it has created a new kind of love and a distinct type of loveliness. For certainly, since Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the world has learned a new reverence and tenderness for childhood, and in expressing these it has discovered in the innocence and simplicity of the Child another embodiment of the Eternal Beauty which dwells at the heart of all things good and true. This was indeed a discovery of incalculable value, to human art as well as to human life. It has given a new theme to poet and painter—a theme of which ancient art and literature knew comparatively little, and showed but few and faint traces. Childhood has only begun to "come to its own," in the works of art as well as in the deeds of charity, since men have heard and believed the story of the Christ-child.

The studies out of which this book has grown have been a source of strength and joy to me for nearly twenty years. They have followed, in very different ways but always with the same spirit, the influence of the story of Christ's nativity and infancy as it has been told and retold, again and again, among men. They have led me, in the time of work, back to the original archives of Christianity to consider and interpret by fresh contact the inexhaustible significance of the brief, inspired record, and on through the history of the Church to trace from century to century the unfolding of truth in her teaching and love in her life, both proceeding from Him who was laid in the manger at Beth-

lehem. They have led me, in the seasons of rest and recreation, into some of the fairest countries and most beautiful cities on earth, to see, face to face, the finest creations of Christian art, and try to understand the conditions under which they were produced, and the meaning which they express. But I have not intended to put anything more than a very small part of these studies into this book—only the results, not the processes; and the results only in so far as they belong to interpretation rather than to criticism.

Pray do not expect to find here an institute of theology or a treatise on painting, a history of doctrine or a theory of art. I have not ventured to attempt these things. There is something less ambitious which I would far rather do. I would like to trace in outline a single chapter from the chronicles of the heart of man; to express, first, in the language of to-day and words of common life, the meaning of the gospel narrative of the infancy of Jesus; to touch next, but lightly, upon some of the legends which have gathered about it, that we may feel how much less they are worth than the primitive record; to follow, then, some of the lines of beauty in which art has interpreted the truth of the story; and at last to leave the impression, which is true, that the chapter is still unfinished, because neither human faith nor human art has yet exhausted, or ever will exhaust, the significance of the story of the Christ-child for the joy and growth and uplifting of mankind.

But there are two points on which you are entitled to look for a more personal utterance, here at the outset, if you are to take the trouble of reading what follows in a spirit of comprehension. It makes a good deal of difference, so far as understanding is concerned, that you should know from what stand-point, in regard to art and religion, the book is written.

First, then, in regard to art: I frankly confess myself an adherent of no exclusive school; a devotee of no particular theory; an admirer of good work wherever and however it may be done. The old masters are admirable, else they would not have survived. The modern painters are admirable; they seem to us

to have learned some things hitherto unknown; and if we are right about this, some of them also will become old masters in the course of time. Among all the manifold works of art we should be looking always with clear eyes to recognize the things that are well done. And by "well done" I mean, first, that they must be evidently worth doing; and, second, that the artist's keen sense of their worth must express itself by a thorough mastery of the medium in which he has chosen to depict them, by patient labour concentrated on its proper object, and resulting in a luminous and significant interpretation of that object to our perception. From this it follows that the things which are well done in art will always have two qualities in greater or less degree: they will be true to nature and really related to fact: they will also be characteristic and expressive of the artist's personality. In other words they will have life-likeness, by virtue of their correspondence to the outer world which the artist sees; and they will have life, by virtue of their relation to the inward personal power with which he sees it. Two artists, equally great, will never interpret the same subject in precisely the same way. In the work of each there will be something individual and distinguished. For the stream of art, as Sainte-Beuve says of the stream of thought, "differs from a river in not being composed of a number of *similar* drops. There is a distinction in the quality of many of the drops." And precisely this distinction is the chief element that gives value to a work of art. The idealists have done well when they have succeeded in making their pictures real. The realists also have done well when they have had ideas. But, after all, there are as many different kinds and qualities of idealism as of realism. Let us not suppose that because Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, are beautiful, there is no water to refresh us in the river Jordan.

And yet this confession of my stand-point in regard to art would not be complete without the acknowledgment that I reckon the sentiment and feeling of a picture to be always more precious than its technical workmanship. I would willingly have walked through a picture-gallery with Coleridge, of whom it is told that

he would sometimes say, after looking at a painting, "There's no use in stopping at this, for I see the painter had no idea. It is mere mechanical drawing. Come on: *here* the artist *meant* something for the mind." Coleridge might have made a mistake in any particular case, for the idea of a picture does not always stand out upon the surface. But in general, it seems to me, his principle was sound and deep. For with the greatest possible respect and admiration for technical skill of every kind, I yet hold, with the latest and one of the best of the critics who have written of "Art for Art's Sake," that without the emotion, feeling, thought, or idea, "one may produce art admirable by virtue of novelty, colour, form, skill of hand—the verve of the artist; with it one may produce a higher art, speak a nobler language, serve a loftier purpose."

In regard to my religious stand-point a word will suffice. I see very clearly that all who have approached the story of the Christ-child with sincerity and humility, whatever their formal creeds, have felt its beauty and its power. The shepherds in their rustic ignorance, the star-led Magi emerging from the misty superstitions of the hoary East, the prophet Simeon devoutly waiting for the consolation of Israel—for all of these there was light and blessing in the presence of the Holy Babe. But at the same time I see still more clearly that the brightest light and the richest blessing, the best treasures of art and the most abundant works of love, have come where the birth of Jesus has been interpreted in the faith of the Christian Church as the personal entrance of God into the life of man. Therefore I hold that this interpretation is true, and I accept it with all my heart.

A year ago I stood in the chapel of the Hospital of the Innocents, at Florence. There, in the dim light, hung Ghirlandajo's fine painting of the Adoration of the Magi. The kings of Orient, with their splendid cortege, knelt before the young child Jesus. In the foreground were two lovely figures of children, clad in diaphanous and fleecy robes of white, kneeling with folded hands and happy faces. As I looked at them more closely I saw by the little drops of crimson, like necklaces of rubies around

their necks, that the old painter had meant them to represent two of the martyred innocents of Bethlehem, and that he had put them into his picture in order that they might silently utter the thought of his heart concerning the comfort and help and salvation which were brought to the helpless and suffering children of earth by the infant Saviour. Then, while this sweet thought was moving within my mind, I left the chapel and passed through the wide court-yard, blazing in the heat of the summer sun. There I saw the painter's prophecy fulfilled in the flesh ; for there was a little outcast child of the city being carried in tenderly to the cool chambers of the hospital to receive the best care and nursing that the healing art of to-day can give. And it seemed to me that the hospital interpreted the picture, and the picture interpreted the hospital. Then I remembered how that great building, with its admirable proportions designed by Brunellesco, its facade adorned with the exquisite reliefs of Andrea della Robbia, and its chapel enshrining one of Ghirlandajo's noblest paintings, had risen in all its loveliness from the Christian faith and compassion of the silk merchants of Florence, who built it four hundred years ago to be a refuge for deserted and defenceless little ones in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ the Lord. The artist's vision of beauty had found its right place in the home of charity, because both were created by the same impulse of devotion to the Divine Christ-child. Surely both expressions of that impulse were true, and their union makes a perfect harmony ; and surely it will be a good day for the world when that harmony is renewed. Modern art, splendidly equipped and full of skill, waits for an inspiration to use its powers nobly. Modern beneficence, practical and energetic, lacks too often the ideal touch, the sense of beauty. Both these priceless gifts, and who can tell how many more, may be received again when the heart of our doubting age, still cherishing a deep love of faith and a strong belief in love, comes back to kneel at the manger-cradle where a little Babe reveals the philanthropy of God.

CONTENTS

PAGE

THE ANNUNCIATION 1

THE NATIVITY 45

THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI 111

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT 147

THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS 187

ILLUSTRATIONS

THE ANNUNCIATION

PAGE

THE MADONNA DEL GRAN' DUCA—RAPHAEL . . . . . *Frontispiece*

THE ANNUNCIATION—FRA FILIPPO LIPPI 3

THE ANNUNCIATION—LORENZO GHIBERTI 5

THE ANNUNCIATION—DONATELLO 9

MOSAIC OF THE ANNUNCIATION—FIFTH CENTURY 14

THE ALLEGORY OF THE UNICORN 17

THE ANNUNCIATION—FRA ANGELICO 19

THE ANNUNCIATION—SANDRO BOTTICELLI 25

THE ANNUNCIATION—FRANCESCO FRANCIA 29

THE ANGELIC GREETING—ROGER VAN DER WEYDEN 33

THE ANNUNCIATION—ANDREA DEL SARTO 37

ECCE ANCILLA DOMINI—DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI 41

THE NATIVITY

IL PRESEPIO—GIOTTO 49

THE VIRGIN IN A WOOD—FILIPPO LIPPI 55

THE NATIVITY—ANDREA DELLA ROBBIA 59

THE NATIVITY—ROGER VAN DER WEYDEN 65

THE ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS—DOMENICO GHIRLANDAJO 69

FROM SARCOPHAGUS OF FOURTH CENTURY 72

PAGE

THE MOTHER ADORING HER CHILD 75

THE NATIVITY—BERNARDINO LUINI 81

LA NOTTE—CORREGGIO 85

THE ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS—MURILLO 91

THE HOLY NIGHT—FRITZ VON UHDE 97

MADONNA IN VLADIMIR CATHEDRAL, KIEFF—V. M. VASNETZOFF 103

THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI

MOSAIC FROM THE CHURCH OF S. APOLLINARE NUOVO, RAVENNA 113

THE WISE MEN AND THE STAR—ROGER VAN DER WEYDEN . 115

FRESCO FROM THE CATACOMBS 120

SHRINE OF THE THREE KINGS, IN THE COLOGNE CATHEDRAL . 123

ONE OF THE MAGI—BENOZZO GOZZOLI 127

THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI—RUBENS 131

THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI—BOUGUEREAU 135

THE ARRIVAL OF THE MAGI AT BETHLEHEM—JOHN LA FARGE 139
(First half of the painting in the Church of the Incarnation, New York)

THE ARRIVAL OF THE MAGI AT BETHLEHEM—JOHN LA FARGE 143
(Second half of the painting in the Church of the Incarnation, New York)

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT—GIOTTO 151

FRESCO—NOTRE-DAME D'ABONDANCE—THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT 155

THE REPOSE IN EGYPT—ALBRECHT ALTDORFER 157

THE REPOSE—LUCAS CRANACH 161

THE HOME IN EGYPT—ALBRECHT DÜRER 165

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT—MURILLO 169

PAGE

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT—PIERRE LAGARDE 173

IN THE SHADOW OF ISIS—LUC OLIVIER MERSON 177

THE TRIUMPH OF THE INNOCENTS—W. HOLMAN HUNT . . . 181

THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS

THE ORLÉANS MADONNA—RAPHAEL 191

THE CHILD JESUS IN THE FIELDS—ALFRED BRAMTOT . . . 197

LA BELLE JARDINIÈRE—RAPHAEL 201

THE VIRGIN AND CHILD WITH ST. JOHN—BOTTICELLI . . . 205

THE HOLY FAMILY—PINTURICCHIO 209

THE HOLY FAMILY—FRANZ DEFREGGER 213

THE CHILD JESUS TAUGHT BY HIS MOTHER—LUC OLIVIER MERSON 219

THE HOLY FAMILY—MURILLO 223

CHRIST AMONG THE DOCTORS—DUCCIO 229

THE BOY JESUS IN THE TEMPLE—HOFMANN 233

THE ANNUNCIATION

There is a vision in the heart of each
Of justice, mercy, wisdom, tenderness
To wrong and pain, and knowledge of their cure;
And these embodied in a woman's form
That best transmits them pure as first received
From God above her to mankind below.

ROBERT BROWNING.

And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David: and the virgin's name was Mary.

And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

For with God nothing shall be impossible.

And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.—St. Luke, i. 26–38.

THE ANNUNCIATION — FRA FILIPPO LIPPI
From a Painting in the National Gallery, London

I

THE Annunciation is the prelude of the birth of Christ. It is the slender song in a maiden's heart which gives the keynote and the motive for all the splendid symphonies, celestial and terrestrial, which have been woven about the name of Jesus. To us who listen across the centuries it seems as if this earlier prophetic melody in the cottage at Nazareth rose immediately into the chorus of angels which the shepherds heard upon the hills of Bethlehem. The interval of long and weary months disappears in our thought. The Annunciation becomes the beginning of the Nativity. We hear in Gabriel's message and Mary's answer simply the first words of "the glad tidings of the Holy Child Jesus."

Surely it is not unnatural that there should be such a prelude to such an event. Nothing in nature arrives unheralded. The dawn foretells the day-spring. The bud prophesies the flower. This is the way of God in His world. And it would be strange indeed—stranger than any miracle — if there should be no announcement of the birth of that well-beloved Son, in whose perfect life the fulness of the Godhood is to be revealed in manhood.

But after what fashion should this annunciation be made? With signs and wonders in heaven and earth? With blasts of celestial trumpets and mighty voices echoing over land and sea? It might have been so in a myth or a fable, but not in the history of a real religion. Turn back to the record of the event which is given by the evangelist Luke, and see the beautiful difference between a true and a false revelation. Read again the strangely simple and moving words in which the story is told. How quiet and serene is the narrative of what befell the lonely maiden of Nazareth. How little there is to strike the eye and how much to touch the heart. How direct and delicate is the phrase. Nowhere else could this story have been preserved, save in the memory of the virgin who was so pure and gentle that angels might gladly do her reverence. And it seems most natural to suppose that St. Luke, in his early discipleship, heard the narrative from Mary's own lips, and wrote down in her own words this sacred poem of the Annunciation.

But what is its inward meaning? What significance has it for the soul of man?

THE ANNUNCIATION — LORENZO GHIBERTI

From the Baptistery Gates, Florence

It seems to me that it is the embodiment and expression of a twofold mystery. It expresses, first of all, the mystery of a divine revelation, a flash of that secret spiritual light which is ever breaking through from the realm of the invisible into the realm of the visible. But it expresses also, and no less truly, the mystery of a human faith, that secret spiritual capacity for receiving enlightenment, which waits and longs for the divine illumination, and is quickened by it into a heavenly fruitfulness. This quiet and obscure event at Nazareth is the point at which the divine light in perfect clearness meets the human faith in perfect receptiveness, and they mingle in a new life.

All through the history of Israel the prophecy of the coming Christ had been gleaming with a vague and diffused radiance, like sunlight playing from behind the clouds on distant waters. Now it is gathered into a single ray, slender, distinct, and vivid with personality. For many centuries Hebrew motherhood had been ennobled and glorified by the great expectancy of the Messiah who should redeem His people. Now the Divine Hope descends dove-like into a virgin's breast and is conceived, and thus begins a human life, borne tenderly and secretly beneath the heart of her who, among all the maidens of Israel, has found favour with God.

How else shall the story be told than in the words of the Sacred Scripture? Could any other form come closer to the reality, or image it more clearly? I have been reading the disquisitions and explanations of the early theologians, but they seem dry and tedious; they

add nothing to knowledge, and they take much from reverence. Curious inquiries into the mystery of physical birth, they are worthless as science, and worse than worthless as religion. I have been reading also the pagan myths of the birth of demi-gods — of Perseus, whom Danaë bore, and of Castor and Pollux, the sons of Leda; but they seem gross and sensual; the heaviness of falsehood clings to them and weighs them down. I have been reading also the tales of Messiah's coming which are told in the Talmud, and which represent the expectations of the great mass of the Jewish people in the time of Christ; but they are full of caprice and fantasy, incoherent and grandiose; they abound in strange portents; they are noisy with the wars of Gog and Magog; they predict the arrival of a monarch whose chief glory is to be the rebuilding of Jerusalem with gold and jewels and costly woods, and the bringing of all other nations to pay tribute to the Jews.

When one turns from all this literature of fancy debased by avarice and perturbed by sensuality, of curiosity pushed beyond the mark, and of realism which becomes untrue because it tries so hard to be exact—when one turns back from all this to St. Luke's narrative of the Annunciation, it is like passing from the glare and turmoil of a masquerade in an artificial park, into the soft fresh air of a real garden, where the dews are falling and the fragrance of unseen flowers comes through the twilight.

How little is defined and yet how much is clear in this atmosphere of inspired verity! Gabriel, "the strength of God," is the name given to the angelic

THE ANNUNCIATION — DONATELLO

From a bass-relief in stone in the Church of S. Croce, Florence

messenger. Mary, "the handmaid of the Lord," is the favoured one of the chosen race — chosen to this special honour, doubtless, for no other reason than because it had cherished the purity and dignity of womanhood more perfectly than any other race of the ancient world. We are not to think of the Hebrew woman of that age as ignorant and degraded. There is nothing at all unnatural or incredible in finding such a character as Mary, so chaste, so meek, so noble, in a quiet home of Nazareth. She is astonished at the gracious and joyful salutation that comes to her; and that also is not unnatural, for it is a greeting hitherto unknown. There is a moment of wonder and surprise; a tremour of maiden fear; a bending of simple faith to receive the heavenly thought; an overshadowing Spirit of power; a new conception of God in humanity. The miracle has come unseen. A woman, blessed among all her sisters, believes that her child is to be the Son of the Highest, and will call His name Jesus, because He shall be the Saviour.

That is the essence of the Annunciation. But what of the accidents — what of the details of form and time and place? All these are veiled. We do not know what was the nature and appearance of the angel; nor whether Mary was waking when the message came, or sleeping and dreaming, as Joseph was when he received his warning. We are not told whether she was reading or spinning in her room, or praying in the Temple, or resting on the house-top, after the manner of the Orient. The hour is not set at morning or noon or evening or midnight. The story leaves these

things, as so much in the Gospel is left, to that reverent Imagination which is "the true sister of Faith." And what I desire to do here is to touch briefly upon some of the forms in which that Imagination has expressed itself in art, and interpret them, if I can, in the spirit of the truth which they embody.

II

We must recall, at the beginning, some of the legends of the Annunciation which are found in the apocryphal gospels and in the poems and romances of the Middle Ages. These are, indeed, the first and most childish efforts of art, and the imagery which the poets and story-tellers use in their narratives is often repeated by the painters and sculptors in their works.

The unknown writer whose fragment of the history of Mary is preserved for us by St. Jerome adds only a single touch to the story of the Annunciation, but it is a very graphic one. He says that the angel, coming in, "filled the room where Mary was with a great light." The author of the book called the *Protevangelium of St. James* gives a much fuller narrative. He tells us that Mary had been chosen by lot from among seven maidens of Nazareth to spin the royal purple for a new curtain in the Temple. One day, as she was returning with her pitcher of water from the fountain, she heard a voice saying, "Hail, thou who art

full of grace!" She looked to the right and to the left to see whence the voice came, and then, trembling, went into her house, and, putting aside the pitcher, took up the purple, and sat down to spin it. And behold, the angel of the Lord stood by her, and said, "Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favour in the sight of God."

In the mediæval poems of Germany, Mary is described as crossing the court-yard to wash her hands at the fountain when the angel first appeared, and as sitting among her companions, who were working discontentedly at the coarser linen of the Temple veil, when he came again to complete his message. These details are often repeated in the early works of art. If it is the first appearance of the angel that the artist has chosen to depict, he shows us the fountain and the pitcher, or the walls and pillars of the court through which Mary is passing. If he has chosen the second appearance, the scene is laid within-doors, and we are reminded by some naïve and obvious token of the work in which Mary was engaged. There is an abundance of such representation of the Annunciation among the ancient mosaics and carvings in ivory and wood and stone. Rohault de Fleury, in his splendid volumes, has described a number of them.

The mosaic from the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, in Rome, is interesting chiefly because it shows the early date at which some of these legendary particulars became the common properties of art. It was made in the fifth century; and here are the skeins of purple on Mary's lap, and the distaff on her arm. For

the rest, the mosaic has little value as an interpretation of the story. It misses the very essence of it by representing Mary as a proud empress on a throne, and calling in three angels with Gabriel to witness the scene.

The most significant and the most enduring imaginative detail in the art of the Annunciation was introduced by St. Bernard. He says that the Virgin was reading in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, and when

MOSAIC OF THE ANNUNCIATION — FIFTH CENTURY
In S. Maria Maggiore, Rome
By permission of the J. G. Gotta'sche Buchhandlung, Nachfolger

she came to the verse, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son," and was thinking in her heart how gladly she would be a handmaid to serve one so blessed, the angel drew near and said: "Hail, Mary! Blessed art *thou* among women." The thought is so beautiful, it is no wonder that art adopted it. The Book, lying open on Mary's knee, or on a desk

before her, or clasped against her bosom, appears in the most and the best of the Annunciation pictures.

Other emblems, with a meaning more or less mystical, were associated with the story, and came gradually into use among the artists, with slight variations depending upon personal choice and training. The lilies, which seem to us the most natural symbols of virgin purity, became common in the twelfth century. They are growing in a pot beside the maid Mary, or carried in the angel's hand. Sometimes he bears in their stead a branch of olive, the emblem of peace, or a royal sceptre surmounted with a cross or a globe. When we see the palings of a garden in the background of a picture, the artist is reminding us of the verse in the Song of Solomon which says, "A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse." The flawless mirror is an illusion to the phrase in the Book of Wisdom, "*speculum sine macula*." The bush which burns but is not consumed is taken from the vision of Moses. The dove is the universal symbol of the Holy Spirit. I have seen pictures of the Annunciation into which the artist has introduced a basket of fruit and a pitcher of water, to signify Mary's frugality; or a cat, to denote, perhaps, her domesticity. Sometimes a painter (following a custom which has come down from the times in which every event in the Old Testament was interpreted as a type of something in the New) will put a little scene from the Old Testament in the distance, representing Eve, because she is the mother of humanity; or Bathsheba, because the Davidic line descends through her that was Uriah's wife. But the strangest

and most mystical of all the Annunciation emblems is the unicorn. I have taken an illustration of it from an old German painting in Weimar. The explanation is found in an allegory which occurs first in the works of an unknown writer of the eleventh century, called Physiologus, and became, somewhat later, one of the favourite themes of mediæval poetry. It runs, briefly, in this wise:

"The unicorn is an animal of such wondrous wisdom and strength that no hunter can take him, and of such gracious quality that his horn wounds only to heal. This represents the Saviour. He is pursued by a heavenly huntsman, who is God the Father, and four hounds, which are named Truth, Peace, Mercy, and Justice. Coming to a pure virgin, he takes refuge in her bosom, lays aside all his wildness, and is captured at last."

It was a strange and confused theology which could evolve such a legend out of its inner consciousness; but, such as it was, the Middle Ages delighted in it; and here you see it all drawn out and carefully labelled, according to the old German poem, which says:

"Der einhurn hüt gevangen ist,
in mägden schos mit grossem list;
der ist gewesen, ihesus crist,
die maget du, maria bist."

III

Out of this unreal and allegorical region of the early legends we may turn with gladness to the freer and fairer realm of pure art, and see how the real thought of the Annunciation has been clothed with forms of beauty.

It is not one of those subjects which test the force of an artist's genius or the fertility of his invention. It does not demand mighty strength in the expression of emotions, or a broad range of comprehensive intelligence in the study of contrasted characters, or even a profound knowledge of history and archæology. It appeals rather to a certain delicacy of sentiment, a fine feeling for the beauty which exists in the simplest things, a power to appreciate truths which evade definition, and to suggest those inward experiences of the soul which are so profound and yet so evanescent that they can hardly be expressed in words.

THE ALLEGORY OF THE UNICORN

By permission of Messrs. Wiegandt and Grieben, Berlin

Perhaps it is due to this quality of the subject that

there are no world-famous pictures of the Annunciation. The greatest artists seem to have passed it by; or if they touched it they did not put their highest powers into the painting, and it remains comparatively unnoticed among their more celebrated works. Thus it comes to pass that one who is studying the pictures of the Annunciation will often find the most charming ones in out-of-the-way places. There is one, I remember, in the little city of Arezzo, over an outer doorway in the neglected church of S. Annunziata. The sacristan brought a long ladder and climbed up to open the crumbling wooden shutters which only half protected it from the weather. It was a fresco by Spinello Aretino; the angel, in his white robe sown with stars and his diadem crowned with the tongue of fire, was kneeling, with his palm-branch, before the fair and humble virgin, and from the Father's out-spread arms above, the heavenly babe came floating down on a ray of light, borne up by two roseate cherubs. An ineffable air of peace breathed from the picture, and it was most lovely even in its decay. Another, of equal though very different charm, I found in the Pinacoteca Vannucci, at Perugia. It was the top of a triptych by Piero degli Franceschi; the virgin walked beneath a marble colonnade beside a secluded garden; the angel who met her had no need of lilies or palm-branch to attest his origin, for his aspect was so noble that, as Vasari says of him, "he was fit to come from heaven." In many unvisited churches and obscure galleries I found pictures of the Annunciation which pleased me with the charm of sincerity and sweetness and purity;

THE ANNUNCIATION — FRA ANGELICO

From a painting in the Baptistery, Cortona

and the best of all was in the convent of La Verna, high above the sources of the Arno, where the loveliest works of Andrea della Robbia are hidden away in mountain solitude.

But the illustrations for this study I have preferred to take from more accessible places and from artists whose names are more familiar. They are not, indeed, men of the very highest rank. But they are men of distinctive quality in the second rank. They have the individuality of genius, the power of giving a peculiar and personal pleasure in their work which we cannot fail to recognize as theirs and theirs alone. I think we should not forget or underrate the place which these secondary artists have in the ministry of every art. Dante and Shakespeare and Goethe are great names; but the sonnets of Petrarch and the lyrics of Shelley and the songs of Heine are perfect of their kind. And so I think that each of these nine artists, whose conceptions of the Annunciation we are to study here, has his own value, and has added something to the interpretation of this sweet and simple theme.

Look, first of all, at the relief by Lorenzo Ghiberti. It is a panel in one of the northern doors of the Baptistery in Florence. They were made before the famous "Gates of Paradise" on the eastern side, and are far less rich and elaborate than those unrivalled portals. But what they lack in finish, in picturesqueness, in abundance of detail and wealth of imagination, they gain in simplicity, in directness, and in nobility. These northern doors, in fact, were made before Ghiberti began to be "a painter in bronze," and the twenty-one

years of labour that he spent upon them were confined to efforts which belong properly and strictly within the limits of sculpture in relief. This representation of the Annunciation is one of the simplest and noblest of the panels. The distinct and unmistakable note in it is the swiftness of a joyful surprise. The angel sweeps forward with a buoyant motion, his garment lifted by the wind of his flight. The holy dove flies like an arrow towards the Virgin's breast. Her slender figure shrinks and sways with wonder as she lifts her hand, half to ward, and half to welcome, the message. Timidity and joy blend in her aspect. The event is isolated from all surroundings. It might be anywhere. It is womanhood visited by God.

Turn from this to Donatello's sculpture in the Church of S. Croce, and see how the difference of individual character comes out in the work of two men dealing with the same subject, in the same age, and under the same influences. Donatello's relief is cut in a fine gray sandstone which is called *pietra serena*, and stands in a beautiful tabernacle against the southern wall of the church. The ornamentation of the background, the hair of the Virgin and the angels, and the borders of their robes are gilded. This gives a strange impression of life-likeness to the figures which I know not how to explain. Moreover, the artist has breathed the very spirit of the Renaissance into his work — that subtle *expressiveness* which seems to catch the shadow of a thought as it passes over the face, and to suggest the intensity of a feeling in a turn of the neck, in the bending of an arm. Donatello's con-

ception of the theme has gone on beyond Ghiberti's. It is not so much the dramatic surprise of the angel's visit that impresses him; it is rather the wonderful nature of the interview between Mary and the angel that he wishes to depict. To each figure he would give the true, the characteristic emotion, yet without fixing it in hard outline, so that it would seem exaggerated and theatrical, but in delicate, sinking lines which appear to be caught almost as they are vanishing. He has thought of the angel's admiration for her to whom he brings such a message. It is expressed in the very curve of Gabriel's body, in the upward glance of his face, in the arms held back as if he did not dare to touch her whom he so reveres and loves. And Mary's face and attitude, with all the beauty of antique sculpture, are tinged also with a sentiment of responsiveness, of gentle courtesy, a spirit lowly and grateful, yet not afraid, which belongs only to the Christian ideal. She has risen from the seat where she was reading, and turns to hear the angel's message. There are none of the usual mystical symbols of the Annunciation, not even the dove. Nothing distracts our attention from the conversation between Gabriel and Mary. It is a lyric with two parts in it, in which the one answers to the other perfectly, and the rhythm would be lost if either were omitted.

Fra Giovanni da Fiesole, surnamed Angelico, found in the Annunciation a favourite theme, suited to the unsullied purity of his spirit; and he has painted it many times with perfect delicacy and ideal truth. One of the best of these paintings is in the Baptistery at

Cortona. Turning from the bare grass-grown piazza of the cathedral, with its splendid view over the Val di Chiama, into the dingy little building, you see this exquisite panel hanging above a tawdry altar on the right hand wall. The Virgin is seated beneath a porch of white marble. Her dress is simple in its form; but the clear, bright colours of the red gown, and the blue robe with its green lining set off the fairness of her face, her hair of red gold, and her hazel eyes. A book lies open on her knees to show that she has been reading. There is a gold ring on the third finger of her left hand to show that she is espoused. She bends forward, with hands folded across her breast, to greet the angel — an image of meekness, of quiet happiness, of maidenly purity. Gabriel is clothed in a garment of heliotrope lavishly adorned with gold, and embroidered with many colored jewels. His hair is like the hue of ripe wheat when the sun shines through it, and his long golden wings are tipped with red, and covered with many eyes. A tongue of fire plays above his forehead. He runs swiftly beneath the porch, shining with delight so great that little rays of splendour dazzle from his whole body. He bears no wand, nor branch of lilies. It seems as if he had come in too great haste to stay for them. There is a childlike eagerness in his face, and in the gesture of his hands, the right pointing to Mary, and the left directed upward. Behind him lies a slope of greensward sprinkled with flowers, and at the top of it we see, as in a vision, the fiery-sworded angel driving Adam and Eve from the lost Paradise. How different is Gabriel's mission

THE ANNUNCIATION — SANDRO BOTTICELLI

From a painting in the Uffizi, Florence

now—to announce a Paradise regained! This is the thought that Fra Angelico has felt and expressed in his picture—the thought of a great and innocent happiness. The Annunciation was a message so joyful that the most resplendent of all the archangels might well be glad and make haste eagerly to carry it to the lowly maid of Nazareth.

The naïvete of this picture is altogether charming. But when we turn from it to look at the small tableau by Fra Filippo Lippi, which hangs in the National Gallery at London, we feel that the childlike spirit of the Angelican school has lost something of its first freshness and naturalness. It has now a touch of conscious artifice. Fra Filippo was the painter of sacred *genre;* and he has translated the story of the Annunciation into language so light and easy that it seems almost playful. There is an irresponsible air about this young angel, in his white dress, with collar and wristband, and breastplate of dark blue, who has stepped aside from the garden path to kneel on the grass, with the branch of lilies over his shoulder. There is a gleam of roguishness in his demure eyes; he is not unlike a celestial choir-boy. The Virgin is seated on a terrace in front of her bedchamber which opens to the garden. Through the doorway you see the bed with its damask coverlet; and in a vase, in front of her, a bunch of lilies is growing. Her dress is of pale pink and blue; her features are small and inexpressive. She is looking down at the dove which flies towards her lap, leaving behind it a succession of rings of vanishing fire, like circles in the water, growing

larger and fainter, until they almost reach the hand at the top of the picture — as if each pulsation of the heavenly wings sent a halo of light quivering through the air. This fancy is not without beauty. For the rest, the picture has a certain grace, but it is all the grace of this world, and the figures bear too clearly the impress of the models from whom they were drawn.

In Sandro Botticelli we have a painter of the same age and race, but of a very different temperament. It is said that he was the pupil of Fra Filippo Lippi; if so, he learned some things that his master could never have taught him. He was a student of psychological problems, of conflicting emotions and strange thoughts, divided between heaven and earth. Familiar with the classic beauty of pagan art, and feeling it profoundly, he was yet most unclassical in all his work. For in his pictures nothing is fixed and quiet. A mystical air stirs in his draperies; a mystical passion breathes from his faces. He has caught them in a moment of transition, while the past fades and the future still is dim. Yet all this movement and flow and conflict of his art is without violence; it is quiet, inward, inevitable. There is far more of yielding in it than of struggle. With him love is often weary and joy often sorrowful. I think his picture of the Annunciation is very characteristic and deep.

The strong squares of red and white in the marble floor, and the formal landscape seen through the open doorway, suggest the fixity, the indifference of the outward world. It is one of those silent, sultry noons when nature seems to be absolutely motionless in the

THE ANNUNCIATION — FRANCESCO FRANCIA

From a painting in the Brera, Milan

heat. The angel has come down unnoticed; his crimson robe, girded up about him as if for a journey, still flutters a little as he kneels, almost crouches, upon the pavement. His eyes are full of reverence; his mouth is sad; it seems to tremble with pity. The Virgin turns from the desk at which she has been reading; she is perturbed and overwhelmed by the mysterious tidings. Her face is plaintive and her heavy-lidded eyes are downcast. She seems to be near fainting as she bends towards the angel with out-stretched arms, the hands bending backward from the wrists, as if beseeching him to depart from her. The picture is full of profound emotion; it tells us at least one truth in regard to the Annunciation which many of the painters have forgotten; it reminds us that Gabriel had need to comfort the Virgin with the words "Fear not!"

In Francesco Francia's picture, in the Brera at Milan, there is none of this intense emotional realism. The scene is laid apparently in the porch of the Temple. The atmosphere is cool, clear, tranquil; it is evidently the hour of evening twilight, in which the bell called the Angelus still rings in memory of Gabriel's visit. The landscape is harmonized with the painter's mood; so still is it that the little lake in the distance reflects the encircling trees as a mirror. The angel, in glistering white, bearing a branch with three lilies, has come gently; and without effort he calls. Mary half turns from the Temple door to listen. I do not know whether she sees him. But surely she hears with quiet and peaceful awe, and her attitude, with that slight drooping of the head which Perugino gives

to his saints, is maidenly and gracious. It is an idyllic Annunciation. The words of an English poet seem to be addressed to such a virgin:

> "Mind'st thou not (when June's heavy breath
> Warmed the long days in Nazareth)
> That eve thou did'st go forth to give
> Thy flowers some drink, that they might live
> One faint night more amid the sands?
> Far off the trees were as pale wands
> Against the fervid sky; the sea
> Sighed farther off eternally,
> As human sorrow sighs in sleep.
> Then suddenly the awe grew deep,
> As of a day to which all days
> Were footsteps in God's secret ways;
> Until a folding sense, like prayer,
> Which is, as God is, everywhere,
> Gathered about thee; and a voice
> Spake to thee without any noise,
> Being of the silence:—'Hail,' it said,
> 'Thou that art highly favourèd;
> The Lord is with thee here and now;
> Blessed among all women thou.'"

It is not another spirit, but only another mode of expressing the same spirit, which characterizes the quaint Flemish Annunciation assigned to Roger van der Weyden, though I know not whether he painted it. It makes little difference; a dozen men of the same school could, and would, have given it the same meaning. The note of distinction here, as in Francia's picture, is serenity. But now it is serenity of a more homely type. Mary is grave and sedate, a thought-

THE ANGELIC GREETING
Roger Van der Weyden

ful maiden, reading and praying in her bedchamber. It is early morning, and the soft light streams through the open window across the bed with its smooth coverlet and neatly gathered curtains. A lily is growing in a pitcher, and has pushed open the lid. Gabriel, discreetly robed in white, stands behind the Virgin and speaks to her. He looks somewhat heavy, as if flight might be difficult to him, but his aspect is very benignant. He is such an angel as such a virgin would have liked to see. There is no fear on her face as she listens, only the faint suggestion of a smile about her lips. It is a placid picture, full of the peace of home and the delight of meditation.

Andrea del Sarto, called "the faultless painter," represents the golden age of Italian art. As a craftsman he stood in the first rank. In sure and skilful drawing, in symmetrical composition, in the smooth harmony of colour, he was a master. But Andrea always lacked a certain fibre of complete and essential greatness. He could execute with perfection, but he could not conceive with sublimity. His style was finer than his thought. I think we feel this in his picture of the Annunciation, which is in the Pitti Palace at Florence. It is technically a beautiful piece of work. Nothing could be better than the poise of the figures, the speaking grace of the angel's face and hand, the delicate design of the reading-desk in the centre and the lofty portico in the distance. But there is a sensation of discord when we see David bending from the portico to look at Bathsheba. That which completes the background spoils the subject. Nor does the Madonna

satisfy us; she is too evidently that Lucrezia Buti, whose fair face was but the mask for a sordid spirit. The one thing that redeems the picture is the loveliness of Gabriel, a shape of immortal youth. It is like that sculpture which Dante saw in the *Purgatorio:*

> "L'Angel, che venne in terra col decreto
> Della molt' anni lagrimata pace,
> Ch'aperse il Ciel dal suo lungo divieto,
> Dinanzi a noi pareva sì verace
> Quivi intagliato in un atto soave,
> Che non sembiava imagine che tace.
> Giurato si saria ch'ei dicess' *Ave.*"

Of modern pictures of the Annunciation there are but few. Bouguereau's painting in the Church of St. Vincent de Paul, in Paris, has a superficial prettiness, but it is utterly and irredeemably commonplace. There is an Annunciation by Burne-Jones which has all the charm of his subtle drawing and colour; but he has made it an echo of Florence in the fifteenth century. It was natural enough for the Florentines to set the scene amid Renaissance architecture and give the figures an Italian aspect; they did it spontaneously and without reflection. But for an English painter of this age to revert purposely to that type savours so much of artifice that it makes his work seem unreal and insincere.

I know of but one significant and noble painting of the Annunciation in our century, and that is Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini*, in the National Gallery at London. The picture, as one looks at it for the first

THE ANNUNCIATION — ANDREA DEL SARTO

From a painting in the Pitti Palace, Florence

time, appears dreamlike in the strange beauty of its colour; it is a lily of white and gold, but with infinite gradations and shadows of light trembling through the hue of purity and the hue of love. All this is lost in the engraving; and yet it is still possible to feel something of the penetrating sweetness of the picture's conception. The poet-painter has chosen a *motif* which art has hitherto neglected. He thinks of the Annunciation as coming, like so many other angelic visits, in a dream. The time is the border-land between sleeping and waking, the visionary hour of early morning. The pale flame of the night-lamp is about to expire; the cool light of dawn shines through the window. The strong Gabriel appears in the aspect of one of those of whom it is written, "He maketh His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire," and the very air kindles at his feet into aureate flames. Mary is fair and delicate, *pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol.* She has just awakened; half-rising from her virgin couch, she is not looking at the angel; she does not see him; her eyes are fixed as in a dream, and she whispers, wondering, "How shall this be?" Her spiritual loveliness is best described in Rossetti's own sonnet:

"This is that blessed Mary, pre-elect
God's Virgin. Gone is a great while, and she
Dwelt young in Nazareth of Galilee.
Unto God's will she brought devout respect,
Profound simplicity of intellect,
And supreme patience. From her mother's knee
Faithful and hopeful, wise in charity,

Strong in grave peace, in pity circumspect.
So held she through her girlhood, as it were,
An angel-watered lily, that near God
Grows and is quiet. Till one dawn at home
She woke in her white bed, and had no fear
At all, yet wept till sunshine, and felt awed,
Because the fulness of the time was come."

IV

What thought, then, shall we bring from our study of these Annunciation pictures? They are only notes in the prelude to our real theme; but even the prelude is not to be forgotten in the larger music; its suggestions are taken up and unfolded; its melody is woven into the larger harmony; it colours and influences all that comes after it. And if our study thus far has been a real interpretation, it will give us something, an impression, a sentiment, a vital thought, which will go onward with us into the story of Bethlehem and the scenes of Jesus's childhood.

Surely this impression can be nothing else than a sense of the beauty and simplicity of the faith with which Mary received the revelation that came to her from on high and called her to perfect and immaculate motherhood. If the angel could say "Hail!" to her, and call her blessed, we may well do her reverence, and love her with honour above all other daughters of Eve. Could the promise of the divine birth at Bethlehem ever have been fulfilled unless there had

ECCE
ANCILLA
DOMINI
Dante
Gabriel
Rossetti

been such a mother, so pure, so reverent, so consecrated to her mission, to carry the holy child beneath her heart and nurse Him in her arms?

Christmas is truly the festival of childhood; but it should also be the festival of motherhood, for the child, even the holiest, is not divided from the mother. We may learn to think of infancy as sacred in the light that flows from the manger-cradle of Jesus. Yet it seems to me we cannot receive that truth perfectly unless we first learn to think of motherhood as holy in the memory of her whose virginal and stainless love found favour with God to receive and guard and cherish the Son of the Highest.

THE NATIVITY

O blessed day which giv'st the eternal lie
To self, and sense, and all the brute within;
Oh! come to us amid this war of life;
To hall and hovel come! to all who toil
In senate, shop, or study! and to those
Ill-warned and sorely tempted—
Come to them, blest and blessing, Christmas Day!
Tell them once more the tale of Bethlehem,
The kneeling shepherds, and the Babe Divine;
And keep them men indeed, fair Christmas Day!

CHARLES KINGSLEY.

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.

And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem (because he was of the house and lineage of David),

To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.—St. Luke, ii. 1–16.

I

THE birth of Jesus is the sunrise of the Bible. Towards this point the aspirations of the prophets and the poems of the psalmists were directed as the heads of flowers are turned towards the dawn. From this point a new day began to flow very silently over the world—a day of faith and freedom, a day of hope and love. When we remember the high meaning that has come into human life and the clear light that has flooded softly down from the manger-cradle in Bethlehem of Judea, we do not wonder that mankind has learned to reckon history from the birthday of Jesus, and to date all events by the years before or after the Nativity of Christ.

But it is a strange thing, and one which seems at first almost incredible, that the unconscious evidence of art does not reveal a very profound impression of the Nativity upon the mind of the early Church. Many careless writers, whose sentiment of what ought to be is stronger than their knowledge of what really is, have

spoken of it as the first and favourite theme of Christian art. But in fact it does not appear in any form until the fourth century; it is represented less frequently than many other subjects from the Old and New Testaments; and it does not really assume a prominent and central place in art until the thirteenth century.

What are the reasons of this? — for reasons there must be. An individual may suppress or divert the play of his feelings according to rule or whim. He may exalt or depress an event in his imagination, he may choose or refuse to picture it with his mind or his hand, for purposes which are artificial and premeditated. But a community, a generation of men, is more natural and naïve. Its legends, its literature, and, above all, its art, inevitably betray its inmost thought and feeling. If the Nativity is pictured but rarely in early Christian art, it is simply because the early Christians did not at first fully realize the great and beautiful meaning of the Nativity in its relation to the whole life of Christ, and, indeed, to all human lives.

I do not imagine for a moment that there was anything defective in the faith of the primitive Church, or that she ever doubted or denied the truth concerning the birth of Jesus. From the beginning she was in possession of the whole truth, but it unfolded slowly in her consciousness, and the true significance of it was gradually made plain. This is the way of God in His world. Christianity is perfect and complete, and has been so ever since it was embodied in the life of Christ. Every one who has Christ in his heart has the whole of

IL PRESEPIO — GIOTTO

From a fresco in the Chapel of the Arena, Padua

it; nothing can be added, nothing can be taken away. But the understanding of it, the living sense of what it means, comes only by degrees, to different men and to different ages. Even yet, as we gladly believe, the Church has much undiscovered country and many hidden treasures in that territory of truth which she has possessed from the beginning. And in the first centuries it is not difficult to see, if we will take the pains to think about it, how and why the Nativity did not receive as profound attention as other events in the history of Jesus.

Probably the first reason was the predominant influence of the resurrection on the thought of the early Christians. It dimmed, for a time, all other facts in the dazzling blaze of its glory. This was for them incomparably the greatest event in the history of Christ, because it was the pledge and proof not only of his Messiahship, but also of their own immortality. His crucifixion was inseparably connected with it, as the consummation of his redeeming work. The entire history of salvation was summed up for them in the words "He died for our sins and rose again for our justification." They did not feel any pressing need of looking beyond this to inquire how Christ came into the world, or what connection there was between his birth and his atoning death. It was enough for them that He was there, that He had been crucified and raised again for the world's redemption; and therefore they were content to centre their thought and feeling upon the festival of Easter, in which these two great events were commemorated.

Possibly another cause which may have overshadowed, at first, the gentle radiance of the Nativity was the fact that all of the apostles, and many of the other disciples, had seen Christ in his resurrection glory; but none of them had looked upon Him as a helpless babe in the cradle. Especially the controlling mind of St. Paul was filled with the memory of the form in which he had seen the Christ — that form of splendour shining above the brightness of the Syrian noon — and dwelt naturally upon the vision of divine majesty rather than upon the lowly picture of human infancy. The epistles were written before the gospels; and of the gospels only one lingers with tender emotion upon the details of the birth in Bethlehem. The thoughts of the early Christians were engaged more constantly with the celestial glory of their Lord than with his earthly humiliation. They found their strength and comfort amid the trials of life in thinking of his Divinity, of his exalted state, of his sovereign power, and of his second coming in majesty, which they expected soon. Compared with these ideas the thought of his humanity may perhaps have seemed less precious, less important to them. It is impossible to make any positive or definite statement on a subject so vague, and so much enveloped in uncertainty. But one thing at least is very significant: the earliest form of error that arose in the Church denied Christ's true manhood, and taught that his outward form was an illusion—a mask of humanity in which the Son of God was disguised.

This was not unnatural, for we must remember that humanity was not very humane to the early Christians.

This world was a hard home to them. Indeed, it was not a home at all; they did not regard it as one. They were oppressed and persecuted and martyred, alike by Jews and by pagans. It was no benefit to them to be born. To die was their true escape and felicity. And so it came to pass naturally that they lived much in the heavenly future, despising the present life, and celebrating the martyrs' death-days as their true birth-days. Thus the great Origen, in a homily on Leviticus, xii. 2, assured his hearers that "none of the saints can be found who ever held a feast or a banquet upon his birthday, or rejoiced on the day when his son or his daughter was born. But sinners rejoice and make merry on such days. For we find in the Old Testament that Pharaoh, King of Egypt, celebrated his birthday with a feast, and that Herod, in the New Testament, did the same. But the saints not only neglect to mark the day of their birth with festivity, but also, filled with the Holy Ghost, they curse this day, after the example of Job and Jeremiah and David." While the leading teacher of the Church was preaching after this wise, we can hardly expect to find the Christians thinking much about the Nativity, or dreaming of a celebration of Christmas.

I do not mean to assert that this was the universal and unbroken condition of thought and feeling in the Church during the first three centuries. There were some men, in advance of their age, who had learned to think of the whole life of Christ in its unity as a life for and with man. Irenæus, in particular, is worthy of special mention and enduring honour as the first of the

fathers to bring out the unfolding of all the stages of human life in Jesus Christ; and even though he had never written another word than this, he deserves to be immortal in the memory of the Church for having said, "He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, thus sanctifying infants; a child for children, thus sanctifying those who are of this age, being at the same time made to them an example of piety, righteousness, and submission."

This sentence holds the heart of Christmas. But it was not until long after it was uttered, it was not until the latter half of the fourth century, that the Church at large began to feel and to develop its meaning. Then it was that she emerged from the storm of persecution into the sunshine of imperial favour. Then she realized that patient suffering and faithful death were not the only duties of the Christian, but that, following God in love, it was possible to begin in this world the purity and peace of heaven. Then she began to feel the wondrous significance of the living entrance of the Son of God into the life of man, and his perfect pattern of holiness in every human relation. Then she passed from the lower conception of a Church saved out of the world, to the higher conception of a world to be saved through the ministry of the Church, a natural year to be transformed by reverent devotion and wholesome piety into the Christian year, a redeeming life as well as an atoning death of Christ, to be preserved in living remembrance by the perpetual commemoration of its chief events. Then it was that, opening her heart to the humanity of religion, she be-

THE VIRGIN IN A WOOD — FILIPPO LIPPI

From a painting in the Berlin Museum

gan to draw near to the humanity of Jesus, and to seek with eager interest for the day of his birth that she might make it holy.

But what clew was there to direct the search? What reason could be given for choosing one day rather than another for the Christmas festival? The gospels, always meagre in dates, were quite silent here. They gave no hint of the day or month of the Nativity. Oral tradition, we may be sure, was equally reticent or indifferent. There were, indeed, a few scattered suggestions of the date of Christ's birth floating here and there among the writings of the fathers; but these were all of late origin, manifestly unhistorical, and, above all, quite contradictory. Clement of Alexandria said that many Christians regarded the 20th of May as the day of the Nativity, others preferred the 20th of April, but he favored the 19th of November. In the Eastern Church the 5th or 6th of January was celebrated as the date of Christ's baptism, and the Nativity was joined with this. Others again fixed upon the 21st of March as the day of Christ's birth. Between such varying and slightly supported assumptions there was little to choose. A historical date was clearly out of the question. Nothing was left for the Church to do but to select some day on grounds of convenience and symbolic significance, and celebrate it by common consent as Christmas Day.

It would take too long to trace the many reasons which probably led to the choice of the 25th of December. It was doubtless connected with the day which had already been generally accepted as the date

of the Annunciation and of the creation of the world. Assuming that the world was made in the spring, because it was commanded to bring forth grass and herbs, and that it was made when the day and night were of equal length, because "the evening and the morning were the first day," it was natural, though somewhat naïve, to fix upon the vernal equinox (according to the Julian calendar, March 25th) as the exact date of the creation. And once having discovered by this easy method the very day on which the world came into being, and the glorious light sprang out of darkness, what more simple than to assume that it was the same day on which the power of the Almighty overshadowed Mary, and the "Day-spring from on high" began his entrance into the world? Nothing could be plainer. Even the least imaginative of chronographers could reckon forward from this fixed point of the Annunciation nine months, and arrive at December 25th as the day of the Nativity. And here another wonderful coincidence meets him. This is the day of the winter solstice, the day when the world's darkness begins to lessen, and the world's light to grow; the day which the ancient world had long celebrated as the birthday of the sun—*dies natalis solis invicti*; what more appropriate day could be found for the birth of the "Sun of Righteousness?" St. Augustine points out an instance of the wondrous fulfilment of Scripture in the fact that St. John the Baptist was born on June 25th, the summer solstice, when the sun begins to decline; but the Lord Jesus was born on December 25th, the winter solstice, when the sun begins to ascend. And in this

THE NATIVITY — ANDREA DELLA ROBBIA

From a bass-relief in the Convent of La Verna

is fulfilled the saying, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

Let us not hesitate to admit that these calculations have very small historical value. At least they have real poetic feeling. I do not suppose that the early Christians intended to fix the exact day of Christ's birth as a matter of infallible chronology. All that they meant to do was to bind their devotions into harmony with the year of nature, and utter their profound belief in the vital unity of the life of Christ with the life of the world. Creation and redemption, resurrection and daybreak, nativity and the returning of the unconquered sun—these are united in the thought of God, and in the gratitude of man. And though the shepherds of Bethlehem may not have watched in the fields by night amid the rigours of midwinter, though the tax registration of Publius Sulpicius Quirinus may not have taken place in December, every heart that feels the simplicity and beauty of the Christian faith can join in the gladness of that Christmas Day which has been consecrated by centuries of holy joy, and which celebrates the emergence of a new light from the darkest and longest of the nights of earth.

The earliest mention of the 25th of December as Christmas Day is found in an ancient catalogue of Church festivals about A.D. 354. And it is surprising to see with what alacrity the date was received and the Nativity celebrated throughout Christendom. It seems as if the world had been waiting for this festival of divine and human childhood, and was ready to welcome it at once with songs of joy. In the year 360 it was

already celebrated in Rome by vast multitudes thronging the churches. Twenty years later, Antioch had taken it up with great popular enthusiasm. And in little more than fifty years from its earliest suggestion, the observance of December 25th as the day of the Nativity had become the universal practice of Christians.

II

It is about this time, the latter part of the fourth century, that we find the legends with which the history of the birth and childhood of Jesus was embroidered, beginning to take a definite shape, and to follow fixed, conventional patterns. The so-called *Gospel of the pseudo-Matthew* was probably written at the commencement of the fifth century. The *Protevangelium of James* and the *Gospel of Thomas* were of earlier origin, but the first clear evidence of their currency in their present form comes from the end of the fourth century. These legendary books came into existence in a very simple and natural way. They were the outgrowth of that native trait of the human mind, familiar to every one who has tried to tell a true story to children—the craving for picturesque detail. A child is never satisfied with the bare statement that a thing happened; he always wants to know how it happened; he demands local colour and dramatic incident. The childish mind of the primitive Christians approached the brief authentic records of Christ's nativity and in-

fancy with precisely this demand, and the apocryphal gospels are simply collections of the traditions, inventions, and myths with which it was answered. Innocent and naïve plays of fancy, they floated lightly and vaguely through the popular mind for two or three centuries, until at last some one brought them together in the little books where they are now found, and tried to give them dignity and authority by attaching to them the name of one of the apostles. Sometimes these books were employed by the sects who found them favourable to their particular heresies; but they were never accepted by the Church at large, nor was there ever any thought among her recognized teachers that they could be considered in the same rank with the authoritative Scriptures. The contrast was too immense and striking; and this contrast has always been regarded as one of the strong practical arguments for the early date and the inspired character of the genuine gospels.

At the point of the Nativity the accumulation of legends is not so great as at other points, earlier and later in the narrative. But it began sooner, and it was oftener touched by poetic feeling and sometimes even by the air of truth. For instance, the first of these legendary details (mentioned by Justin Martyr about the year 150) was a really not improbable answer to a very natural question. For what could be more natural to one reading for the first time St. Luke's account of the Nativity than to wonder and ask in what sort of a place "the manger," in which the infant Christ was laid, may have stood? And certainly there is noth-

ing improbable in the statement of Justin (who was a native of Palestine, and well acquainted with the custom, which still prevails in that country, of using grottos or caves in the rock as stables and shelters for cattle), that the manger was in a cave. The tradition has been generally accepted. But the artists have not always found it easy to adapt it to the conditions of their art. The sculptors have followed it most frequently; to cut a cave in the rock was quite in their line of work. A few of the painters have kept closely to the idea of the grotto—for example, Mantegna, in his "Nativity," and Lionardo, in his "Virgin of the Rocks." But more commonly they have modified it; at first, as Giotto has done, by placing a slight shed over what seems to be the mouth of a grotto; then by changing the grotto into a ruined building with a thatched roof over it, as Roger van der Weyden and Ghirlandajo have done; then by entirely losing the idea of the cave in the idea of the stable, as Luini has done; and then by enveloping the event with shadows, as Murillo has done, so that one cannot tell whether the place is a stable or a cave.

One of the most beautiful legends of the Nativity is that which is given in the *Protevangelium* in regard to the miraculous calm and silence of the Holy Night. Joseph, having left the Virgin Mary in the cave, goes out to seek a nurse. "And I," says he, "was walking and was not walking; and I looked up into the sky and saw the sky astonished; and I looked up to the pole of the heavens and saw it standing, and the birds of the air keeping still. And I looked down upon the earth,

THE NATIVITY — ROGER VAN DER WEYDEN

From a triptych in the Berlin Museum

and saw a trough lying and work-people reclining, and their hands were in the trough. And those that were eating did not eat, and those that were rising did not rise, and those that were carrying anything to their mouths did not carry it; but the faces of all were looking upwards. And I saw the sheep walking and the sheep stood still; and the shepherd raised his hand to strike them, and his hand remained up. And I looked on the current of the river, and I saw the mouths of the kids resting on the water and not drinking, and all things in a moment were driven from their course." This is an idea which neither painting nor sculpture can express; for though, strangely enough, it is only a description of what one sees in every statue and in every picture — a momentary action fixed in a beautiful rest — yet neither picture nor statue can tell us that the rest continues; their natural interpretation is that it is only an immeasurably brief instant in that ever-changing current of life which flows through all things. But poetry can do that which lies beyond the power of the other arts; and we find this idea of immobility and profound quietude, of the heavens at least, expressed in Milton's "Ode to the Nativity:"

> "The stars with deep amaze
> Stand fixed in steadfast gaze,
> Bending one way their precious influence;
> And will not take their flight
> For all the morning light,
> Or Lucifer, that often warn'd them thence."

There are two other noteworthy legends in regard to the Nativity. One, which is common to several of the

apocryphal books, describes the dazzling supernatural light which filled the cave with glory. The other is narrated in the book which is called by the name of Matthew: "And on the third day after the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, the most blessed Mary went forth out of the cave, and entering a stable, placed the child in the stall, and the ox and the ass adored him. Then was fulfilled that which was said by Isaiah the prophet, saying: The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib." Both of these legends have been freely accepted by the artists. There is hardly one of them who does not introduce the ox and the ass; and sometimes the latter animal is represented with open mouth, lifting up his voice in audible adoration. The miraculous radiance has been employed by some of the painters to produce wonderful effects of light and shade. A famous example of this is Correggio's picture in the gallery at Dresden.

There are also certain symbols or mystical emblems which are frequently introduced into pictures of the Nativity. The cross is placed in the hand of an angel or of the little St. John to remind us of the future of the Holy Child. The lamb is the type of his purity; and when it is bound with cords it represents his sacrifice. The dove is the emblem of the Holy Spirit; it also speaks of meekness and innocence. The goldfinch, because of the red spot on its head, is connected with the memory of Christ's death. A sheaf of wheat is often used as a pillow for the infant Jesus, or a few ears of it are placed in his hand, as a symbol of the bread of life. When He has his finger laid upon his

THE ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS — DOMENICO GHIRLANDAJO

From a painting in the Academy, Florence

lips it is to remind us that He is the Word of God. The palm is the symbol of martyrdom and glory; the olive is the emblem of peace; the globe represents his kingly authority. Thus in the silent language of signs the artists have expressed the thoughts of wonder and worship which have gathered through the ages about the cradle of Christ.

III

The works of art which have been inspired by the Nativity may be arranged in several groups. First of all there are the pictures and carvings which deal with the subject in its simplest form. These again are of two kinds: the older artists usually represent the Virgin Mary reclining on a couch and the Child wrapped in swaddling-bands in the manger beside her; the later artists show us Mary and Joseph kneeling before the Child, who lies on a pillow or on a corner of his mother's robe. Then there is a very large class of pictures which represent the adoration of the shepherds, the Child lying on his mother's lap, or in the manger, while Joseph stands in the background. Another group of pictures which belong properly to the Nativity are those in which the mother is worshipping her child in solitude. This mode of treating the subject was very frequent among the Italian artists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It expresses with tender felicity the thought of the Nativity which must have been in

the heart of Mary. Yet one more class of pictures seems to me to be rightly included in the spirit of this theme: the pictures of the Madonna and Child in which there is no attempt to enthrone them or to surround them with celestial splendours and attendant saints, but the artist shows us simply the mother with her Divine Babe folded in her arms. This is what Mrs. Jameson has well called the *Mater Amabilis*. But I am sure that the subject belongs more truly to the life of Christ than to the "Legends of the Madonna," for the central thought of it is that wondrous birth in which the Son of God trusted himself to a mother's care and rested on a mother's breast. Of each of these ways of depicting the Nativity I have chosen two or more illustrations; but it will be more convenient to describe and interpret them, not in separate classes, but in the order of their age.

FROM SARCOPHAGUS OF FOURTH CENTURY
In the Church of St. Celsus, Milan

The little carving from a stone sarcophagus in the Church of St. Celsus at Milan was probably made in the latter part of the fourth century, and is one of the oldest known representations of the subject. It is a rude and simple bit of work, done by an unknown hand of no great skill, and conceived in that purely symbolical spirit which was characteristic of early art; for it is evident that there is here no effort to depict an historical event. It is simply a hint, a mystic sign of a story

already well known. And yet the old stone-cutter's work is not without its charm, for it shows us how truthfully and how reverently he has thought of his theme. The thatched roof over the entrance of the grotto, the manger, the ox and the ass, the Child wrapped in swaddling-clothes and lying alone, suggest the lowliness of Christ's birth. The angel with the cross, lifting up his hand in wonder, is the primitive artist's way of assuring us that he believed this lowly birth had a Divine glory and significance.

For nearly nine centuries after this, art made very little advance, gained very little power to represent the scenes of the gospel history as real events. Indeed, it almost seems as if it lost power under the deadening influence of the Byzantine traditions; and the gorgeous mosaics of San Marco in Venice are far less animated than the early paintings in the catacombs and carvings on the sarcophagi. But one needs to be familiar with the dreariness and deadness of art in these dark ages in order to appreciate at its full value the revival which came to pass at the end of the thirteenth century. It was Giotto, master of the seven liberal arts and friend of Dante, who brought this new life to its fullest and most perfect expression. A poet, a sculptor, a daring architect, he was, above all, the man who raised the art of painting from the grave. In 1305 he went down from Florence to decorate the walls of the little Chapel of the Arena at Padua, which still remains, in spite of the ruins of time and the labours of the restorer, one of the most precious shrines of art. If you approach these frescos with a demand for perfection of technique as

the one thing indispensable in painting; if you come to them with an eye habituated to superficial prettiness and clever rendering of insignificant subjects, you will be disappointed. Giotto knew little of perspective as we understand it. He was ignorant of anatomy. When he wished to represent a man lying down he simply tipped the figure over on its side. His animals look as if they were made of wood, and his mountains are impossible. Even his lovely colours, which were the wonder of his own age, have lost a great deal of their pristine purity and brilliance.

But you will forget all this if you come into the little Chapel of the Arena directly from the desert of Byzantine art. It will seem to you like an oasis of sincerity and beauty. Giotto dared to conceive and depict the gospel story not because the Church told him, not as the Church told him, but because he was filled with a living sense of its reality and worth; because he felt that to make these scenes visible again to men would help them to live nobler lives. And so he cast away the restraints of formalism, and reaching deep down into human nature, covered the walls with the finest and most living figures that he could paint. He went straight to the heart of every event. He spent no time on the embroidery of a robe or the jewels of a throne; what he wanted to do was to make other men see and feel, as he had seen and felt, the reality of the story and the profound emotion of those who were engaged in it. This is what he has done in his picture of the Nativity. The landscape is extraordinary, the sheep are ligneous, and the goat resembles a unicorn. But the sentiment

THE MOTHER ADORING HER CHILD

From a painting ascribed to Giovanni Bellini, in the Church of Il Redentore, Venice

of the picture is perfect, and it is expressed with the simplicity of genius. The young mother is reaching out her arms to lay her new-born babe for the first time in his strange cradle. There is a tenderness of love, a wondering solicitude in her face and in her touch that none but a poet could have ever conceived. Three of the angels above the stable are lifting up their hands in adoration—"Glory to God in the highest"—one of them is stooping to tell the shepherds his glad tidings of "good-will to men," but the fifth angel bends with folded hands of silent reverence above the holy place of the Nativity, and we feel that here indeed is "peace on earth," a peace of which every mother's heart knows something when she looks on the face of her first-born child.

But with all this directness and intensity of feeling in Giotto's art, there is in it something of that spirit of generality, of universal rather than of particular beauty, of desire to express itself in typical forms more than in strongly marked individual traits, which was the tendency of antique art at its best. Giotto broke away from the hard and inexpressive Byzantine type with its meagre, sombre face, and narrow, fixed eyes; but he was powerfully influenced by the classic type of full and nobly moulded beauty, made familiar to the artists of the early Renaissance by the rediscovery and admiring study of the works of ancient sculpture. It is true that his strong dramatic sense frequently led him to agitate these classic faces with sharp emotion, so that they sometimes approach perilously near to grimaces. But even this does not destroy the impression of dignity,

repose, breadth, in his work; the classic air still breathes from it; in this picture of the Nativity, for example, we feel that there is a real relationship to the bass-relief of the same subject by Niccolo Pisano on the pulpit of the Baptistery at Pisa, in which the Virgin is a copy of a figure of Alcestis, and the head of Joseph is modelled after an antique bust.

In the work of Fra Angelico the classic influence gave place to something new and very different; a profound and delicate spiritual impulse in the old monk's heart, born of constant prayer and self-discipline and seclusion of soul, even in the midst of successful labour and popular applause, created an original and ethereal type of beauty, more intimately fitted than the classic type to express purity and reverence and "such joys as angels feel." His pictures of the Nativity, of which one of the smallest (that which adorned a panel of the great silver chest of the Church of the Annunziata in Florence) is one of the best, seem to be touched with celestial serenity and refinement. But their spirit is still general rather than particular; the faces are not individual, they are typical, though the type is changed.

It was not until the fifteenth century that the spirit of individualism took possession of art, and the passion of personality came to distinct expression. Then the artists ceased to detach, to refine, to generalize, and began to particularize, to emphasize, to accentuate personal traits, so that the faces in their pictures were not so much general representations of characters as they were portrayals of individual men and women. Nothing seemed to these artists of greater interest and impor-

tance than making their work life-like; and life-likeness, as they understood it, could be best attained by resemblance to particular persons. This new spirit, this primitive realism, found utterance in Fra Filippo Lippi, a monk of a very different character from Fra Angelico. He was registered in the Carmelite monastery at Florence in 1420, but was little adapted to wear the cowl with credit. Impulsive, ardent, pleasure-loving, irresponsible, Brother Filippo was continually in debt and trouble. Vasari's story that he ran away with Lucrezia Buti, a nun of Prato, who had been sitting as his model for a picture of the Virgin, has been denied by recent critics who have too high an admiration for Filippo's painting to believe anything bad of his character. But though this story may be a malicious fable, there can be little doubt that his life was eccentric and irregular, and that he did many things that he ought not to have done. And yet he did some things that he ought to have done, among which we may reckon the loving care and joy with which he executed his work as a painter, and the delight with which he rendered the faces of young children and innocent maidenhood. Somewhere in his turbulent breast he must have preserved a spring of pure imagination, for nothing could be more delicate and lovely than his picture of the Nativity, in the Berlin Museum. The Virgin is kneeling alone before her Child in a nook in the forest. The scene, the locality, the historical circumstances of the event are all forgotten. The Child lies smiling with his finger on his lips. The Virgin's face is very human and girlish, with its rounded cheeks, small mouth, pointed chin,

and nose which almost seems to turn a little upward. She is one of those young maidens, gentle and pure and shy, who remind us of spring flowers. Her hands are folded and her head is bent above her babe. She is not the Queen of Heaven, but the *mater pia* of the human heart. Every mother thinks her child wonderful, but more than all this mother, who beholds the Light of the World lying in her cradle. As Jeremy Taylor says, "She blesses Him, she worships Him, she thanks Him that He would be born of her."

I remember well my first sight of this picture, nearly twenty years ago. Hitherto the "old masters" had seemed unattractive and dry. And this little panel of green with its few spots of light—could anything be more stupid, or less worthy of its stars in the catalogue? So I thought as I first looked at it; but as I passed it again and again, and began to linger a little before it, trying to reach its secret, something in the slender grace, the sweet humility, of this virgin's figure, the simplicity of the Child looking up from its bed of wild flowers (each one painted as carefully as if the artist loved it), a breath of poetry from the dark, cool shadows of the wood fascinated me more and more, and at last I appreciated my first "old master."

There is a close resemblance in subject and in spirit between this picture and the bass-relief of the Nativity, by one of the Della Robbia family, which is in the Convent of La Verna. I say by one of the family, for four generations of the Della Robbia worked in that inexpensive and beautiful material of glazed and coloured clay which has become inseparably associated with their

THE NATIVITY — BERNARDINO LUINI. From a painting in the Church of Saronno

names, and it is not always possible to decide whether Luca, the eldest, or Andrea, his nephew, or Giovanni, the son of Andrea, or one of the three sons of Giovanni, was the author of a particular relief. But the evidence of style is in favour of assigning this exquisite Nativity to Andrea, who had, perhaps, less power than his uncle Luca, but more grace and charm, and something near akin to the manner of Fra Filippo in rendering the half-humourous, half-pathetic beauty of infantile faces. I climbed up to see this panel, from the smiling vine-clad valley of the Casentino where Arno rises, through the narrow streets of Bibbiena, and over miles of chestnut-covered hills, to the lofty, lonely cliff where the Convent of St. Francis stands among its immemorial groves of fir and beech, rich in wild flowers, and haunted by myriads of birds. The bass-relief is in the main church of the convent. It is composed in celestial blue and white, except the green sheaf of wheat on which the Christ-child lies. His face is full of life and loveliness, more expressive than the Child in Fra Filippo's painting. Light clouds float above his head. A family of joyous angels, all alike, yet all different, as if they were children of the same household, cluster about the Heavenly Father, from whom the Holy Dove is floating downward; and lest we should forget that the angels sang, Andrea has put the score of the *Gloria in Excelsis* in the centre of the panel. The attitude of the Virgin, with her slender neck, bent head, and long fingers sensitive to the very tips with almost tremulous delight, is not different from Fra Filippo's, but the face is nobler, as if she understood more profoundly the

meaning of her adoration. While I was lost in contemplation of this most beautiful tablet, there came into the quiet church a peasant woman who had toiled up the long steep hill, under the blazing sun, from her home somewhere among the neighbouring valleys. She was clothed in poverty and bent almost into deformity by the burden of hard labour; a black handkerchief was folded about her weary, wrinkled, patient face. She came as close as she could to the little altar beneath the tablet, and knelt there for a long time, praying in a murmur while the tears ran down her withered cheeks. I know not what tale of sorrow, anxiety, or loss was told in those low whispers; but it was a strangely moving sight to behold that figure of the never-ceasing yet ever transient troubles and griefs of suffering humanity close beside the image of immortal joy in which the artist's hand had pictured the loveliness of the Virgin Mother adoring her Divine Child. Is not the artist also a minister of grace and comfort to the lowly? It was a thing not to be forgotten to see the look of renewed peace and patience on the poor, brown face as the woman dropped her two mites into the alms-box, and crept slowly out into the sunlight.

Roger van der Weyden's picture of the Nativity, in the Museum at Berlin, is one of the best works by that devout and thoughtful Flemish master, and represents admirably the spirit of northern art in the fifteenth century. Even more realistic and individual in its aim than Italian art of the same period, it had another ideal of beauty and independent forms of expression. Roger had travelled much in Italy; he had seen the palms and

LA NOTTE — CORREGGIO

From a painting in the Dresden Gallery

olives and vineyards, the splendid cities and melting landscapes, the gay colours and graceful forms, the great frescos and the classic works of art of the South, but he came back from it all unchanged and true to his own ideals. There is no touch of Italy in his work; it is all of Flanders. Grave, subdued, simple, hard in outline, amazingly distinct and delicate in finish, angular in drapery, cool and serene in colour, his pictures are full of the pensive inwardness and self-restraint of the northern spirit, and exhale through all their formality an air of sincere and spiritual beauty. This Nativity was painted about 1450 for Pierre Bladolin, the treasurer of the Golden Fleece, and the founder of the little city of Middleburg, in Flanders, where he established the coppersmiths who had been burned out of the city of Dinant. An upright and industrious man, he rose by his own exertions to a position of wealth and influence in the court of the Duke of Burgundy, but it is said that the courtiers disliked him for his gravity and economy. Is it not all written in his thin, thoughtful face and his figure plainly clad in sober black, as Roger has painted him, kneeling, in the corner of the picture? In the background we see the church and castle which he built at Middleburg. The Nativity is represented just as he would have thought of it: a quaint, homely scene. The Virgin's face, with its full forehead, wide-arched brows, and downcast eyes, speaks of purity and piety and thoughtfulness. Joseph is a careful, toil-worn old man, sheltering with one hand the flame of the little taper which he holds between the fingers of the other. The tiny angels with their coloured wings seem

to be clad in long woollen robes as if to resist the northern cold. The Holy Child, lying on the corner of his mother's mantle, is a frail and helpless new-born infant, but the illumination of the scene all flows from Him. He is the Light.

Domenico Ghirlandajo brings us back again into the opulent life of Italy at the close of the fifteenth century, and shows the culmination of the school of Florentine realism. His picture of the Nativity, in the Academy at Florence, displays the strength and the limitations of that school. The scene is somewhat confused and overloaded. Two Corinthian pillars, evidently brought from some ruined temple, support a thatched roof, beneath which the ox and the ass are sheltered. A richly carved sarcophagus, with a Latin inscription, does duty for the manger. The Christ-child lies on the ground in front of it, and the mother worships Him. But she does not quite forget herself. There is less devotion and more dignity in her look than Lorenzo da Credi or Andrea della Robbia would have given her. And yet she is womanly and beautiful. In the foreground there are two kneeling figures, and a third standing behind them with a lamb in his arms. These represent the shepherds. Vasari admired them immensely, and called them *cosa divina*. But they are unmistakable citizens of Florence—portraits (and excellent portraits too), as we can see at a glance. They are shrewd, cultivated, worldly-wise gentlemen of the Medicean type, knowing about as much of sheep as the first well-dressed acquaintance whom you may meet in an afternoon walk on Fifth Avenue. It seems strange to us

to see them "assisting," as the French say, at the Nativity. But Ghirlandajo did not think it strange, nor did the Florentines laugh at him. Was it because they had a lower idea of the sacred event, or a higher idea of the dignity and worth of humanity than prevails in the nineteenth century? Perhaps neither of these was the true reason, but it was simply because they had grown used to seeing the scenes of the gospel history represented as miracle-plays, at the great Church festivals, in the midst of a crowd of citizens who were the friends and contemporaries of the actors, and who seemed equally in place in pictures of the same scenes.

But the most noticeable feature in this picture of Ghirlandajo's is the background. In a rich landscape we see a distant city, a rocky hill-side where the angel is appearing to the shepherds, a Roman causeway, and a triumphal arch, through which a long procession is rapidly approaching. Horsemen and footmen with fluttering robes and rich caparisons—a royal escort for the Kings of Orient—come sweeping onward to the lowly shed. It seems as if the whole world were hastening to give a joyful welcome to the Prince of Peace. It is thus that the painter, a citizen of prosperous and luxurious Florence, has expressed his conception of the meaning of Christmas.

In Umbria another school of artists was at work developing a very different ideal of the Nativity. Silence, sentiment, and a mystical feeling pervade the pictures of Perugino. The very atmosphere is filled with the clear softness of twilight, and a tender, half-dreamy look rests on all the faces. Venice cherished still an-

other ideal. Stronger, richer, and more earthly in their imagination, the Bellini and their disciples painted the Madonna with less of virginal grace and more of matronly dignity. The Child lies upon her lap or on a marble balustrade before her, and the mother looks at Him with a face in which there is hardly a trace of deep emotion. She is proud, classical, almost indifferent, and the splendid infant sleeps serenely, or listens with royal approval to the angels who make music for Him with guitar and violin. In Padua the painters were even more influenced by classical models and the spirit of the Renaissance than in Venice. A careful study of their pictures is as good as a lesson in Greek and Roman antiquities; but, with the exception of Mantegna in his simpler moods, they have little to tell us about Bethlehem and the wonderful birth.

The coincidence of Lionardo da Vinci, Michael Angelo, and Raphael, in Florence, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, marks the highest period of Italian art. Each of these men was his own master, although each of them owed much to his instructors. Michael Angelo had perhaps the mightiest and most original genius of the three. But he never painted the Nativity. Raphael, the apostle of sweetness and light, the worshipper of beauty, the wonderful scholar of Perugino, who so soon surpassed his teacher, left no picture of the event of the Nativity. The Adoration of the Shepherds, in the Loggie of the Vatican, is the work of his pupil, Perino del Vaga.

But Raphael's Madonna del Gran' Duca is in

THE ADORATION OF THE SHEPHERDS — MURILLO

From a painting in the Prado, at Madrid

many respects the most perfect and lovable of those pictures which express the sentiment and significance of the Nativity by simply showing us the Virgin with her Divine Babe. This little panel, which hangs now among a crowd of large and splendid paintings in one of the richly decorated rooms of the Pitti Palace, is simple to the verge of austerity, yet it has a soul-winning charm which draws one back to it again and again to be soothed and refreshed. We do not wonder that the Grand Duke of Tuscany, who bought it in 1799, and from whom it takes its name, became so fond of it that he carried it about with him wherever he went, even into exile, and believed that it was a source of blessing to his life. The ground of the picture is a very dark green; against this the half-length figure of the Virgin is in soft relief. Her robe is deep blue, her gown red with a black border, without ornaments or jewels, and of that indistinguishable material which Raphael used for his most sacred personages. It was not that he did not understand the painting of brocade and velvet; his portraits, and often his pictures of the saints, show a complete mastery of the secrets of texture; but he felt, with the instinct of a supreme artist, that there was a dignity so high and a beauty so divine that it had no need of artificial adornment; the best reverence that he could show would be to make the dress forgotten. Mary's face is pensive, virginal, exquisite, touched with the modest beauty of pure motherhood. A light veil protects but does not conceal her smooth brown hair; her soft hazel eyes are bent with a contented gaze upon her Child; her upper lip is slightly

pressed upon the lower and turned upward at the corners, as if a sweet thought were passing through her mind and would soon break into a tender smile. The Holy Child sits lightly upon her hand, pressing his right cheek lovingly against her shoulder, and turning to look out with a gentle, almost sad gaze upon the world which He came to save. There is a mystery of unfathomable thoughtfulness in his eyes, full of grace and truth. Yet He clings to his mother most naturally; the mystery does not divide them nor destroy the soft harmony of the twofold devotion. We feel, in the presence of this picture, the power of the noblest imagination to help faith, and realize that Divinity is so near to humanity that the Son of God could be born of a woman and rest in the shelter of mother-love.

Lionardo's influence upon Raphael was distinct, and it went far deeper than the surface, as we can see in this picture, with its inward and inexplicable refinement of charm. But Lionardo, with all his varied powers, perhaps because they were so varied, left no picture of his own which seems fully adequate to the expression of his genius, unless it was the "Last Supper," which has faded to a spectral image of its original grandeur. Among the Milanese painters who were fascinated by his subtle manner and owned him as their master, the noblest was Bernardino Luini. His conception of the Nativity has nothing extraordinary or striking about it, but it is very graceful and attractive. The pilgrim's flask and bag tell the story of the long journey to Bethlehem. The lovely angels bring the air of heaven into the rude stable. The Virgin's figure is

sweet and pure. And Joseph is worthy to kneel beside her. For this last grace especially we thank Luini. Many of the artists have treated Joseph with scant respect. They have represented him as an ugly and decrepit old man. They have shoved him away into a corner, or propped him up against the wall, ridiculously fast asleep. They have almost used him as a comic figure in the scene. The ox and the ass are often more venerable. But Luini, with better authority in the gospel narrative and the earliest traditions of Christian art, has given us a noble and manly Joseph, with a face which corresponds to the dignity and generosity of his conduct. I do not know a more serene and reverent picture of the Nativity than this; and it loses none of its simplicity and sincerity by the touch of intellectual beauty in the Virgin's face, which Luini could only have learned from Lionardo.

But, it may be asked, is such a picture as this true to nature and history? Have we any right to imagine so much beauty and grace in the mother of Jesus? Was not the stable at Bethlehem a dark, mean place, and the Nativity, like every birth, a scene of anguish and confusion? Is there not a touch of falsehood in thus idealizing it and turning it into poetry? If the painter is strictly accurate and literally truthful, will he not feel bound to paint a common girl of the Hebrew people for the Virgin, a carpenter of Palestine for Joseph, an ordinary Eastern cattle shed for the stable, and an uncomely infant for the Christ-child?

But certainly it would be a strange and unreal thing to exclude all poetry from the treatment of the Nativity.

The very heart and life of it is poetry—not poetic fiction, but poetic fact. Read again the opening chapters of St. Luke's gospel, and see if they are not overflowing with the poetry of the Nativity. The heavenly messengers who announce Christ's coming, the old priest Zacharias and his wife Elizabeth, the venerable Anna and Simeon waiting in the temple, Mary herself in her maidenly simplicity, all speak in poetry by a spontaneous impulse. A new star blossoms in the celestial fields, a new music rings through the vault of night, a new worship calls the shepherds from their flocks into the secret shrine of incarnate Divinity. And all this, so far from seeming strange and untruthful to us, must appear only natural, and the strongest confirmation of the truth of the narrative. For if the Nativity is anything at all, if there is any reality in it, it is surely the one supreme event of the world, and not otherwise could the story of it be told. As Horace Bushnell has said: "Having wings in the spiritual outfit of our nature, it would be a kind of celestial impropriety if God's spirit did not spread them here. Why, the very ground ought to let forth its reverberated music, and all the choirs and lyres and ringing cymbals of the creation, between the two horizons and above, ought to be discoursing hymns, and pouring down their joy, even as the stars do light."

I think, therefore, that the artist is true to the spirit of the Nativity when he rises above the limitations of a hard literalism and enters into the ideal mystery and beauty of the Holy Night.

What shall we say, then, of Correggio's "La Notte,"

THE HOLY NIGHT

From a painting by Fritz von Uhde

that third treasure of the Dresden Gallery, and most popular of all pictures of the Nativity? There is no crude realism here. It is an indubitable poem on canvas. But we may still question a little whether the poetry is exactly of the right kind. The movement is overstrained; it lacks repose and delicacy of rhythm. This big shepherd, with his violent gesture of wonder, this woman with contracted brows and hand lifted to shade the dazzle of light, these wonderfully agile celestial limbs vibrating in ecstasy — a man who truly believed in the Nativity, and felt it most profoundly, would have left these out. But Correggio was too excitable, too sensuous, too fond of showing his skill in foreshortening and contrast of light and shade. He was a wonderful artist, but his genius was not pure, sincere, reverent, and therefore there is a touch of affectation in his work. He is like a preacher who tries to say witty or pretty things in a sermon on the life of Christ. We detect the false note, and it spoils our devotion.

But, for all that, the heart of this picture — the mother embracing her Child — remains a marvel of beauty, and the world has a right to love it. It was no new or original idea to make all the light of the stable come from the Divine Babe. But no one else has done it so beautifully as Correggio. The glory that streams from the infant is a white, brilliant, supernatural radiance, manifestly of heaven; and away behind the hills the dawning of the earth-light looks cold and gray.

The decline of Italian art into superficiality and exaggeration, in the latter part of the sixteenth and in the seventeenth centuries, was followed by a remark-

able development of genius in Holland and Flanders, represented by Rubens, Van Dyck, and Rembrandt. But it was not at its best in dealing with religious subjects, although the etching-needle of Rembrandt has wondrously illuminated some of the scenes from the ministry of Christ. In Spain, during the seventeenth century, there was a glorious after-bloom of art represented by Velasquez and Murillo. Of these two Velasquez was the greater painter, but Murillo had a far more profoundly and sensitively religious soul. The record of his eventful life is beautified by the spirit of cheerful piety, and active benevolence, and unfailing, fertile joy in labour. He was a child of the people, and a painter for the people of all time. His pictures are known throughout the world, and have been more highly valued than those of any other man except Raphael. He could paint the ragged children of Seville, and the devout monks who were his companions in works of charity, and the glad angels who thronged the heaven of his holy thoughts, with an equal skill. He was humble, reverent, humane, believing, living well up to the light that was given him, loving his art only less than he loved his faith and his fellow-men, doing his duty as well as he could, and dying in honourable poverty.

This was the man who touched the Nativity once more with the hand of faith and love, as the earliest artists touched it. His picture of the Adoration of the Shepherds, from the Prado at Madrid, is painted in his middle manner, which is called *calido*, from its warmth of colour. No engraver, however skilful and

patient, can hope to render anything more than the cold shadow and suggestion of its wonderful effect. It is a miracle of painting—warm, rich, full of a soft and mellow charm, satisfying the eye with its depth of light and colour—and at the same time it overflows with the purest and most sacred feeling. See this old shepherd, with his toil-hardened feet and his rugged head; he does not exaggerate his emotion and fling his arms about like Correggio's giant, but the awe and tenderness of his emotion are manifest in every line of his figure as he kneels with rude, unconscious grace before the new-born Prince of Peace. And how natural, how infantile, yet how serenely divine and luminous, is the Christ-child, over whom his mother bends with mingled solicitude and adoration! Surely there is something more in this picture than what Ruskin slightingly calls a "brown gleam of gypsy Madonnahood." It is a perfect illustration of the old French *Noël:*

> "Dieu parmy les pastoreaux,
> Sous la crèche des toreaux,
> Dans les champs a voulu naistre,
> Et non parmy les arroys
> Des grands princes et des roys—
> Lui des plus grands roys le maistre."

The eighteenth century has little to offer in the way of sacred art which is of any great value or significance. In the beginning of the nineteenth century there was a strange revival in Germany which produced the school of Overbeck and his disciples. They devoted themselves with a mild fanatical ardour to the service of religion

in art and art in religion, wearing their hair long and dressing in quaint costume, so that they were called "the Nazarites," living together in the deserted Monastery of San Isidoro at Rome very much as the painter-monks had once lived in the Convent of San Marco in Florence. They went back to Fra Angelico for their inspiration, and much of their work seems like a pale reflection of his. But the movement was too self-conscious, too theoretical, too imitative and formal in its methods. It lacked strength and originality. It belonged to a past age more than to the present. And so its influence, always confined to a narrow circle, faded slowly like a tender dream of youth, leaving behind it, however, a few amiable and delicate pictures of the Nativity, among which those by Carl Müller of Dusseldorf are probably the most familiar.

In our own generation religious painting has not been popular. It has been overshadowed by other interests. The artists have devoted themselves to solving the problems of light and shade, of colour, of atmospheric perspective, of decoration, of vivid pictorial effect. Some of the most celebrated reputations have been won by the brilliant and daring handling of subjects in themselves trivial or unworthy. Others again have attained and deserved fame by their interpretations of the beauty of landscape and the sea, of the significance of ancient mythology and poetry, of the pathos of peasant life, of the subtle secrets of portraiture. But how few are the pictures in which the new-found skill of technique has been sincerely and spontaneously devoted to the service of the beautiful gospel of Christ!

MADONNA IN VLADIMIR CATHEDRAL, KIEFF

painting by V. M. Vasnetzoff

And yet there are signs of an awakening in many lands—an awakening in which strange and diverse elements are at work; the crudest realism and the most poetic idealism; the national spirit which would translate the scenes of Christ's life into the dialect of each race, and the universal spirit which would create for it new types of general intelligence; the growth of historical and scientific knowledge expressing itself in the demand for accuracy of dress and surroundings, and the love of pure beauty seeking chiefly the perfect harmonies of form and colour; the admiration for the great work of the old masters which produces a conscious or unconscious imitation, and the spirit of independence which cannot bear to follow any master—all these influences are making themselves felt in the different men who are turning back to the birth and infancy of Christ as to a rediscovered theme for art, and recognizing that since it has meant so much to the greatest artists and to the past ages it may mean something to us.

In other chapters of this book there are illustrations of the work of Mr. Holman Hunt—the one among the English pre-Raphaelites who has remained most true to the ideals of that important school—of Bouguereau, Luc Olivier Merson, and Lagarde among the French, of Prof. Heinrich Hofmann among the Germans, and of Mr. John La Farge among the American painters. The head-piece of this chapter is from a tender and sensitive little sketch by Mr. Du Mond, a young American. I wish that I could speak here also of the eminently thoughtful and suggestive pictures which have been

recently painted by Mr. Abbot Thayer and Mr. George Hitchcock. In all of these there are signs of promise for religious art. But the two pictures which have been chosen from our own generation as illustrations of the thought of the Nativity have each a peculiar quality which makes them especially significant as interpretations of the theme.

The "Holy Night," by Fritz von Uhde, represents modern realism in its most emphatic form. The technique, if I might speak of that, the brush-work, the handling of light and form, the theory of perspective, are the very essence of modernity. But the conception of the painting is still more striking. The picture follows the antique arrangement of a triptych. There are two wings, containing the approach of the shepherds on one side and the choir of angels on the other, and a central panel with the Nativity. But here all trace of resemblance to the antique ceases, and everything is directly and literally translated into modern German. The scene is a barn in Bavaria. In a rude loft a bed has been hastily improvised and a man's heavy great-coat is thrown over it for covering. A stable-lantern hangs against the wall. Joseph is half asleep upon the steps of a ladder in the background. Mary is a peasant girl of the plainest type, ill-clad and weary. The light from the lantern, shining through the cold, misty air, seems to throw a halo about her. A great joy illuminates her face, and her hands are clasped in a natural gesture of ecstasy as she bends over the Child who is curled helplessly upon her lap. Is the realism carried too far? Is the accent of homeliness, of utter poverty

too strong, so that in time, when the impression of novelty wears off, it will seem strained and false? Time alone can answer that question and determine whether the picture is only an experiment or a lasting work of art. But for the present we may value it as a sincere protest against the unreal and faithless painting of the Nativity which makes it only an insipid arrangement of lay-figures, a tableau in a sacred drama, or an unbelieving imitation of a picture by one of the old masters. This work at least has the vitality of a fact in it. It means to bring the gospel close to the heart of the common people; and if it helps to bring the heart of the common people close to the gospel it will fulfil a noble mission. It is a Folk-song of the Nativity in South German dialect. And may not this also be a sacred language if it conveys a word of God?

The Russian "Madonna and Child," from the cathedral at Kieff, belongs to the same class of pictures as Raphael's Madonna del Gran' Duca; but how immense is the difference in conception! The Virgin's face, true to the traditions of the Greek Church, conveys a reminiscence of the old Byzantine type. But her figure, conceived in the modern spirit, is simply yet majestically placed in a vague, dim landscape, stretching away in the twilight like the faint outline of a great continent, above which she towers till her head seems to be among the stars. The Christ-child, pale, solemn, wide-eyed, a child of Divine sorrow and hope, lifts his arms with a gesture of indescribable exultation, as if He would proclaim liberty to all the inhabitants of a suffering land. Is it a dream, or do we truly read here a speechless

eloquent gospel of peace that is coming to a nation at strife with itself, and of emancipation that shall set the prisoners free, and of rest that shall descend upon the weary and heavy-laden from Him who was born a peasant in a captive land, to become the Deliverer of the oppressed and the world's true Leader into light and liberty?

IV

In art all that is sincere and expressive and masterly is valuable. There is no school that has the monopoly of merit, no way of painting that is the only right way. In religion all that is pure and reverent and spiritual is precious. There is no exclusiveness in true piety or virtue. The thought of God is always "larger than the measure of man's mind," and each soul discerns but a fragment of it. As we look back upon the manifold interpretations of the Nativity that art has given to the world we may value all that are significant and genuine and beautiful, feeling one fine quality in one and another profound meaning in another. And yet none of them may completely satisfy us. All that the past has done will not suffice for the present. For the birth of Christ has a message in it which is inexhaustible and needs to be interpreted anew to every age, to every race.

Two great movements have taken place in our own times which must have an influence upon the future. One is the earnest effort to understand the historic life of Christ, proceeding in part, at first, from a sceptical

impulse and working with an anti-Christian purpose, but awakening by this very purpose the dormant energies of Christian scholarship, and resulting more and more triumphantly with every year in a firmer conception of the eternal reality of the person of Jesus. The other movement is the revival of popular interest in art and the effort to make it minister more widely to human happiness and elevation. As yet these two movements have not fully interpenetrated one another, although there are evidences that they are coming into closer contact. When the true relation between them is established; when Christian theology has fully returned to its vital centre in Christ, and its divided forces are reunited, amid the hostile camps and warring elements of modern society, in a simple and potent ministry of deliverance and blessing to all the oppressed and comfortless "In His Name;" when art has felt the vivid reality and the ideal beauty of this humane gospel of the personal entrance of God into the life of man, and has come back to it for what art needs to-day more than all else—a deep, living, spiritual impulse and inspiration—then art will render a more perfect service to religion, and religion will give a new elevation to art. The noblest subjects will become the painters' favourite themes. The marvel of the Nativity will be interpreted again with new meanings of immortal loveliness and truth. The priceless skill of the greatest artists will be employed once more to paint and carve upon the walls of hospitals and asylums and refuges for poor and helpless children of earth the vision of the Christ-child shining in his lowly cradle,

sheltered and worshipped by pure mother-love. Amid works of benevolence and works of art, beautiful to the sense and to the soul, living faith will join hands with reverent imagination at the birthplace of the Son of God, who became a human child in order that the sons of men might become the children of God.

THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI

See how from far upon the eastern road
The star-led wizards haste with odours sweet:
O run, prevent them with thy humble ode,
And lay it lowly at his blessed feet;
Have thou the honour first thy Lord to greet,
And join thy voice unto the Angel quire,
From out his secret altar touch'd with hallow'd fire.

JOHN MILTON.

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet,

And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.—St. Matthew, ii. 1–12.

MOSAIC FROM THE CHURCH OF S. APOLLINARE NUOVO, RAVENNA

I

THE story of the Wise Men who came from the East to pay their homage to the Holy Child at Bethlehem has always been a favourite theme of Christian art and legend. It was depicted everywhere: on the walls of the Catacombs; on the sculptured faces of sarcophagi; in the glittering mosaics of the basilicas; in the palaces of the rich and the churches of the poor; on gilded drinking-glasses, and carved doors, and marble pulpits, and painted ceilings, and bronze coins, and jewelled shrines —everywhere that art has left its touch we see the Magi worshipping the infant Saviour. From the second century the long, rich train of representations runs on unbroken through the nineteenth. We may safely say that there is no subject in the range of history, sacred or profane, which has received more splendid illustration.

Side by side with this stream of pictures and carv-

ings runs the kindred current of imagination speaking to the ear instead of to the eye. Traditions and fables, myths and allegories, fragments of history and philosophy, poems and plays and chronicles, gather about the story in marvellous abundance. It is like a trellis overgrown with vines, so luxuriant, so fertile in leaves and blossoms, that the outline of the sustaining structure is almost lost. It would be easy for one who looked at it carelessly to suppose that the whole fabric was flowery and fictitious, with nothing substantial about it. On the other hand, it is no less easy to mistake the growth of fancy for the framework of history, and accept the later legends as if they belonged to the original narrative. I suppose the hymn,

"We three kings of Orient are,"

is sung in many a Protestant Sunday-school in hearty unconsciousness that its first line embodies two purely ecclesiastical traditions.

Our first task, then, if we would understand the Adoration of the Magi, is to go back to the simple narrative as it is given in the original records of Christianity. Then we must trace the growth of the legends which have formed about it, and then at length we can hope to comprehend and appreciate something of the works of art in which it has been illustrated. Pictures and sculptures tell the story of religion as veraciously as the decrees of councils and the chronicles of historians. But their meaning does not lie upon the surface. It yields itself only to him who studies them

THE WISE MEN AND THE STAR- ROGER VAN DER WEYDEN

From a painting in the Berlin Museum

with care and patience in the light of the age from which they came.

The story of the Magi, as it is given by the evangelist Matthew, is astonishingly brief and unadorned. He tells us without preface that when Jesus was born in Bethlehem certain foreigners arrived at Jerusalem. He does not tell us how many they were, nor of what race, nor of what station in life; although it is fair to infer from the consideration with which they were received at the court of Herod, and from the fact that they carried treasure boxes with them, that they were persons of wealth and distinction. The most important statement in regard to them is that they were Magians—that is to say, disciples of Zoroaster, and members of the sacred or priestly order of Persia, which was then widely scattered among the Oriental nations, and included men of exalted rank. They came from the East, a word which to the dwellers in Palestine could hardly have any other meaning than the ancient region of Chaldea, lying beyond the Jordan and the desert. Their explanation of their journey to Herod was that they had seen an appearance in the heavens (whether one star, or many, or a comet, they did not say) which led them to believe that the King of the Jews had been born, and they had come to do reverence to Him. Herod was greatly troubled at hearing this, and sent for the chief priests and scribes to inquire where the prophets had foretold that the Messiah should be born. They answered at once that Bethlehem was the chosen place. Then Herod, having asked the Magi how long it was since they first saw the ap-

pearance in the sky, sent them away to Bethlehem, promising that when they had found the young Christ he also would come to do reverence to Him. Having set out on their journey, they saw once more the celestial sign; and it directed them to the place where Jesus was. Coming into the house (for Joseph had now found better shelter than a stable), they saw the young Child with Mary his mother, and prostrated themselves in worship. Opening their treasure chests, they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. Then being warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they took another road into their own country.

It must be confessed that if we accept the tradition as a part of the narrative, and suppose that what they saw in the sky was a single star which moved directly in front of them all through their journey, and finally took its stand just over the door of the house of Joseph in Bethlehem, it would be difficult to parallel the story. But if we take the account as it is given by the evangelist, we find a remarkable light thrown upon it by the discoveries of modern astronomy. The conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn is one of the rarest of celestial events. It occurs only once in eight hundred years. This conjunction, all astronomers agree, happened no less than three times in the year 747 A.U.C., shortly before the birth of Christ. In the following year it took place again, and now the planet Mars joined the conjunction. In 1604 the astronomer Kepler observed a similar conjunction, and saw, between Jupiter and Saturn, a new,

brilliant, evanescent star. The astronomical tables of the Chinese, which are the most ancient records of the sky, mention a star of the same character, which, according to the best calculations, appeared and vanished in the year 750 A.U.C. These strange things must have been visible to all who observed the heavens in that year. Certainly they could be seen from Jerusalem, and to one leaving that city they would appear to lead in the direction of Bethlehem. It may be that we have here, in this "fairy tale of science," a confirmation of this beautiful story of religion, a hint and trace of

> "the light that led
> The holy elders with their gift of myrrh."

Once having entered the house and found the Child whom they sought, their conduct in his presence could hardly have been different from that which is described by the evangelist. Their deep obeisance was a sign of that religious reverence with which every Persian was accustomed to regard a king. The gifts which they took from their treasuries were appropriate to the region from which they were brought and the person to whom they were presented. It may even be that the Magians attached a symbolical meaning to them, for the language of the Orient is figurative; and perhaps the old Church father, Irenæus, gives us historic truth as well as poetic beauty when he represents the Wise Men as offering gold to the royalty, and incense to the divinity, and myrrh to the humanity of the newborn King.

It is no wonder that the Christians of Rome, painting upon the walls of their underground hiding-places and cemeteries those rude but cheerful pictures, like bright flowers blossoming in the darkness, which expressed the hope and joy of their early faith, fixed upon this story as one of the first subjects of their art. It spoke to them of the coming triumph of their religion, and of the glory and dignity which touched the Christ even in his cradle. For the chapel and for the grave it had a word of promise, glad, generous, and exultant. In the hands of these first artists the picture corresponded with the simplicity of the gospel narrative. It was little more than a sketch, a vague out-

FRESCO FROM THE CATACOMBS

line, without fixed form or curious detail. The number of the Magi varied from six to two. One of the earliest of these paintings is from the Catacomb of SS. Marcellinus and Peter at Rome. Mary is seated in a large chair; her brown hair is unveiled, as a sign of

her virginity, her bare feet are crossed, and her eyes are downcast. She holds the Child in her arms. Two Magi approach, one from either side, and present their gifts in golden dishes. There is no sign of royalty about them; but their Phrygian caps, short tunics, and mantles show that they come from the East. This picture dates from the first half of the third century.

As we go on tracing the subject through the long series of representations in the fourth and fifth and sixth centuries we find its form becoming more fixed and particular. New details are added: an open book, to show that the Magi were familiar with the prophecy of Balaam; a star above the Child, to show the way in which He was recognized; an old man standing behind the chair of Mary and pointing upward, to represent Joseph, or the prophet Isaiah, or the Holy Ghost; the heads of camels, to tell the story of the journey. The number of the pilgrims is fixed at three, to correspond with the number of their gifts, and perhaps also with the three Hebrew children at the court of Nebuchadnezzar, whose story is frequently given as the companion piece to that of the Magi. At length the crowns appear, in the great mosaic of S. Apollinare Nuovo, in Ravenna (A.D. 534). Byzantine art shows us the "three kings of Orient," stiff, formal, glittering with gold and jewels, as they stride with equal step to present their offerings to the Madonna and her Child, enthroned in state and guarded by four archangels with star-tipped sceptres.

II

Here we find ourselves in the midst of the great stream of legends, which takes its rise in the apocryphal gospel of St. Thomas, and flows on, through sermons, and mysteries, and miracle-plays, and poems, and chronicles, until finally there is hardly any conceivable question which pious curiosity could ask about the Magi for which the pious fabulist had not a ready answer. Some of these legends are very beautiful, and some of them are very grotesque. There is great store of them to be found in the *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine, and in the quaint old German poems of Peter Suchenwirth, Konrad of Fussesbrunn, Walther of Rheinau, and the clever Lady Hroswitha, the "White Rose" of the cloister of Gandersheim. It would be a long task to enumerate them all, and trace them to their sources. But let us imagine a monk of the fifteenth century preaching at the feast of Epiphany in the Cathedral of Cologne. The long procession, with swinging censers, and tinkling bells, and waving banners, has carried the splendid golden shrine of the Magi, crusted with precious stones, in its solemn circuit of the church. The music dies away, and the preacher mounts the pulpit and unfolds the familiar tale of wonder.

"In this casket, my children, sleep the bones of three mighty kings. Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar were their names, but in Greek they were called Galgalat, Malgalat, and Sarithin. Now Caspar was sixty years

SHRINE OF THE THREE KINGS, IN THE COLOGNE CATHEDRAL

From a photograph by the Arundel Society, London

old, and he came from Arabia; Balthasar was forty years old, and he was black, for he came from Saba; Melchior was twenty years old, and his country was Tarshish. These kings had heard the word of the prophet Balaam that a star should come out of Jacob, and they waited for its appearance. Moreover, certain great miracles had happened to them. One of them had seen an ostrich hatch an egg, out of which came a lion and a lamb. Another had beheld a flower more beautiful than a rose, growing on a vine, and out of it flew a dove which prophesied of Christ; and the last had a child born to him which foretold the birth and death of Jesus, and after thirty-three days, as the child had said, it died. So these kings did use to go together to a mighty pleasant place, with fountains and choice trees, on the side of a high mountain, called Mons Victorialis, to watch for the star. And suddenly, while they were praying, with hands and eyes lifted up, it appeared to them in the form of a little babe, exceeding bright and shining, so that all the other stars were lost in its brightness. Then these kings were very glad, and gat them in haste upon their dromedaries, and followed the star day and night, without eating or sleeping, till they came on the thirteenth day to Jerusalem. And some say they went so swiftly because God helped them; but it may have been, my children, that the dromedaries were very fast.

"Now when they had inquired of Herod the place in which the King of the Jews should be born, they went on to Bethlehem; and the star, going before them, stood still over the very house where Jesus was

dwelling. So they entered, and found the Holy Virgin and the Child, and worshipped them, offering gifts. And Melchior gave thirty pieces of gold, the same which had been made by Terah, the father of Abraham, and given by Joseph to the Sabeans as the price of the spices with which he embalmed the body of Jacob, and brought again by the Queen of Sheba when she came to visit King Solomon. Nor did the three kings forget the parents of our blessed Lord, for as they were departing they gave to the Virgin money and silken robes, and to Joseph gold and jewels. And Mary gave to them one of the linen bands in which the child was swaddled, which they kept as a great treasure, for when it was cast into the fire the flames had no power upon it, but it came out whole.

"Now an angel had spoken unto them in a dream that they should not return to Herod, for he was seeking to destroy them and the young child also. So they took ship, and went around by Tarshish into their own country. But after they had departed the star fell into a deep well hard by the house. And in that place, my children, a great wonder is seen. For those who look into the well behold the star in the bowels of the earth, moving from one side of the well to the other, just as if it were in the sky. But when many persons are looking in, the star appears only to those who are wisest and most sound in mind. And this doubtless is the reason why that French deacon from the church of Tours who went lately to the Holy Land could not see the star, though he looked long into the well.

ONE OF THE MAGI—BENOZZO GOZZOLI

From the fresco in the Palazzo Riccardi, Florence

"Now many years after the three kings had returned to their country the holy apostle Thomas travelled thither and baptized them in the Christian faith. So they went out to preach, and were slain by the barbarous Gentiles of the far East. But the holy Empress Helena of blessed memory discovered their bones, and brought them to Constantinople. From there they were carried to Milan, and not long after the Emperor Barbarossa brought them from that place unto our own city. Here at last the bones of these great travellers and wise kings find their rest, and have worked many great miracles, and are the glory of our city, so that you, my children, must rejoice in them, and give liberally of your gold that this cathedral may be finished to the praise of God and the honour of the three kings."

Something like this was the legend which the curious fancy of the Middle Ages evolved out of the history told by St. Matthew. A modern version of it, less miraculous but more realistic and picturesque, is given in the opening chapter of *Ben-Hur*, with its three camels emerging suddenly from the unknown, and its mystic meeting of the travellers in the lonely valley of the desert. If we wish illustrations for the story, there is hardly a single point of it for which we cannot find some creation of art, grotesque, or quaint, or lovely, as the genius of the artist and the spirit of his age and country may have moulded his work.

Would you be certified of the names of the kings? Here the sculptor has carved them for you on a relief over the portal of S. Andrea in Pistoia. Would you

know how the star appeared to them? Taddeo Gaddi will show you in the church of Santa Croce at Florence. Would you follow their pilgrimage? You may do so under the guidance of Andrea del Sarto in the cloisters of Sta. Annunziata; or if you prefer a modern picture, Mr. Edwin A. Abbey has drawn it for you in black and white. Would you behold them before Herod? You have only to look at the ceiling of the cloister-church at Lambach, or the chancel arch of S. Maria Maggiore at Rome. Would you watch their adoration of the Christ-child? Meister Stephan will display it to you above the high altar of Cologne, or Hans Memlinc in the hospital at Bruges, or Andrea Mantegna in the Uffizi, or Domenico Ghirlandajo in the chapel of the Innocents at Florence, or Francia in the picture-gallery at Dresden, or Titian in the museum at Madrid, or Niccolo Pisano on the glorious pulpits of Pisa and Sienna, or Paul Veronese in the National Gallery at London, or Sodoma in the church of San Agostino at Sienna. Would you know how Joseph looked when he received his present? There he is, in Fra Angelico's lovely panel in the Academy at Florence. Would you see the kings warned in their dream to keep away from Herod? They are sleeping on the portal of the cathedral at Benevento and on Giovanni Pisano's pulpit at Pistoia. Would you behold their embarkation in the ship of Tarshish? Benedetto Bonfigli shows their return by sea in his picture at Perugia, and Gentile da Fabriano has put it into the background of his great painting at Florence. You have only to choose what you want—devout feeling, or gor-

THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI—RUBENS

From a painting in the Museum at Antwerp

geous colour, or dramatic intensity, the patient realism of Germany or the splendid idealism of Italy, marble or wood-carving, bronze or mosaic, fresco or oil-painting—and you shall have it from the hand of a master.

III

Let us take five illustrations of the story, two from the fifteenth century, one from the seventeenth, and two more from the nineteenth.

The painting by Roger van der Weyden represents the Appearance of the Star to the Wise Men. It is one of the side-panels of the triptych in the Berlin Museum, of which we have already studied the central picture in the chapter on the Nativity. The other side-panel depicts the legend of the vision in which the Roman sibyl shows the Virgin and Child to the Emperor Augustus (a portrait of Philip the Good). It was painted in 1450, and apart from its value as a work of earnest and devout Flemish art, it has especial interest as an evidence of the fact that some of the legendary additions to the story of the Magi made an earlier impression upon northern than upon southern art. In the pictures which the Florentines, Fra Angelico and Benozzo Gozzoli, were painting about this time we find, for example, no trace of the legend that one of the kings was a black man, and the ages of the three are not always distinctly marked. But Van der Weyden has embodied all the details of the story in his picture; the star appears

miraculously in the form of a shining babe; one of the kings is black, with thick lips and woolly hair; and, unless I am mistaken, the crown of the oldest king is resting upon the parchment of Balaam's prophecy, in which they had read of the star to come out of Jacob. In a painter of to-day the attempt to imitate all this quaintness of sentiment would be as false and unnatural as the effort to reproduce the Flemish stiffness of outline and rich elaboration of ornament. But in Roger it was all sincere, and therefore it is beautiful in its own fashion. The clear, calm light of early dawn which illuminates the landscape with pensive radiance, and the serene awe of devotion which is expressed in the faces and figures of the Magi, are but the reflection of the old painter's tranquil and believing spirit, which the magic mirror of art has preserved for us through three centuries of turmoil and doubt.

The most remarkable and interesting of all pictures of the Magi is Benozzo Gozzoli's fresco in the Riccardi Palace at Florence. This Benozzo, if history speaks the truth of him, was a most delicious man, correct in his conduct, respected and beloved by his neighbours for his amazing industry and exemplary piety, and at the same time not in the least spoiled or priggish, but filled with an ever-new passion of wonder and delight towards all the creatures of God, and resolved to show as many of them as possible in his pictures. His great opportunity came when the Medici, the Rothschilds of Florence, sent for him, in 1459, to decorate the walls of the family chapel in their new palace. The room is only about twenty-five feet square, but all the walls, except

THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI—BOUGUEREAU

From the painting in the Church of St. Trinité in Paris

on the side which has been cut away in modern times to make room for a window, are completely covered with the most gorgeous colours and life-like figures. I know of no room in the world which makes such an overwhelming impression of the opulence of painting. The subject which Benozzo chose was the Journey of the Kings of the East, and he has crowded the whole chapel with it, leaving only the square recess where the altar once stood for two beautiful rows of adoring angels and a picture of the Nativity, which has now disappeared. It is an idle thing to say, as many of the guide-books do, that the frescos were painted by lamplight because there was originally no window in the chapel. Such superb colours were never mixed in artificial light. The little room is, in fact, only a space portioned off within a lofty, well-lighted hall, and Gozzoli must have worked there before the ceiling was put on. Then his pictures were closed in, like jewels in a casket.

He has represented the long procession of the Magi as passing through a valley, into which they come winding down on the left, and out of which they go winding up on the right, with prancing steeds and stately warriors, graceful pages and wrinkled councillors, spearmen and huntsmen, sleek greyhounds, spotted leopards, and keen-eyed hawks. Meanwhile, on the hills around, life goes on as usual. Hunters follow the deer, travellers pursue their journey along winding roads to the distant towns, the pines stand straight and solemn upon the rocks, and the palms lift their feathery heads against the sky. The oldest king is a portrait of the venerable

Patriarch of Constantinople, with his long snowy beard and red robe, riding on a white mule. Behind him, as the second king, comes the Greek emperor, John Palæologus, dark-faced and haughty, in his rich green dress and pointed crown, looking just as he did when he came to the famous council at Florence in 1439, at which the union of the Greek and Latin Churches was promised but not accomplished. The third king is the young Lorenzino de Medici, then a boy of some twelve years. He is dressed in white, embroidered with gold, and wears a light blue turban on the golden curls which cluster round his cheeks and fall upon his neck. His proud eyes look out at you serenely, as with hands crossed over his gemmy bridle and spurred feet daintily touching his stirrups, he bestrides his grand white charger, which tosses its head as if it felt the joy of carrying the flower of the Medicean house, the hope and glory of Florence. He is followed by a throng of people, mounted and on foot, among whom are Cosimo de Medici, the aged head of the family, and his son Piero, and the painter himself, in a red cap with the inscription *Opus Benotii* on the brim.

It is a marvellous *opus* indeed, and one which gives us great admiration for Benozzo's fertility and skill. But what has all this Florentine display to do with the story of the Magi? Little enough, to be sure, if we take it literally; but it was the best that Benozzo knew of the pomp and splendour of earth; and if the innocent old painter could only have brought it all in truth to the feet of the infant Christ, Florence might have had a happier history, and the dream of the Emperor Palæ-

THE ARRIVAL
[illegible]
MAGI AT
[illegible]
—JOHN LA
FARGE

First half of the painting in the Church of the Incarnation, New York

ologus might have been fulfilled in the union of Eastern and Western Christendom.

The immense Adoration in the museum at Antwerp is one of the most triumphant works of that robustious pagan and superb colourist, Peter Paul Rubens. It is said that he finished the picture in thirteen days. It was a *tour de force*, yet from a painter's point of view there is little to be altered. The figures are wrapped in a flood of warm light, brilliant without glare, and filled with harmonious tones. Types of beauty and of ugliness appear side by side. The two noble princes in the foreground; the burly African in green and peacock blue, with his thick lips and rolling eyes, looking down in scornful surprise upon the babe whom he must worship; the grotesque heads of the camels; the grinning Nubians peering beneath the cobwebbed beams of the stable; the joyous child, leaning from the lap of his mother, who smiles at his eagerness; the curious spectators; the soldiers' helmets; the Corinthian pillar in the background; the head of the ox, dashed into the foreground with a few swift, sure strokes of the brush —what a vigorous tableau is this! How rich, how dramatic, how frankly heathen!

The picture by Bouguereau in the Lady Chapel of the Church of St. Vincent de Paul, at Paris, is likewise one of the best that its author has painted. But here we have passed from the religious atmosphere of Antwerp in the seventeenth century to that of Paris in the nineteenth. The artist is learned; he respects the traditions; he is devout; he will not lose the doctrinal meaning of the scene. Yet he is, above all, a beauty

worshipper. He must have graceful outlines, smooth surfaces, refined colours. The Virgin is seated in front of a marble house, under an awning. Her blue robe covers her dress completely; only a touch of red shows at her wrist. She seems weary and oppressed. In the background the white houses of the Syrian town lie quivering in the heat. The child Jesus seems to be nearly a year old. He sits on Mary's lap, leaning back, with his right hand raised in benediction. It is the attitude of a young prince. The three kings, two of whom are dark, middle-aged men, while the third is old and gray, kneel before the Child, and one of them swings a censer. They are dressed in long robes of dull yellow, with diadems and large halos. Their attendants carry gifts and fans of peacock's plumes. St. Joseph, a dignified and protecting figure, stands beside the Virgin, with one hand on the back of her chair and the other laid on his breast. It is all very carefully composed, solemn and stately. The impression which it makes is one of elegance. But, after all, the picture misses something. It is not deep enough. Its colour lacks warmth, and its figures lack life. Its beauty is elaborate and unreal. It says too much and too little; for a great painting must be at once frank and reserved. It must express its meaning, and yet have a mystery in it, something below the surface, which leads the mind on into the secret of visions.

When we come to La Farge's double picture in the chancel of the Church of the Incarnation, at New York, we find these conditions met, and may justly say that

THE ARRIVAL OF THE MAGI AT BETHLEHEM — JOHN LA FARGE

Second half of the painting in the Church of the Incarnation, New York

this latest work of art upon the familiar theme is also one of the noblest. In drawing, the picture is not faultless; there is a touch of insecurity in some of the figures. In colour it is a victorious experiment "in the key of blue." The painter has abandoned the traditions. He shows us four pilgrims, not kings, but Magians of the East. One of them has dismounted, and kneels, uncovered, with out-stretched, trembling hands, a sincere and eloquent figure. The others, seated high upon their wearied horses, are still in the background. A shining angel, white as snow, points to the couch where Mary is lying with her babe.

How significant the action with which she lifts the veil from "the Light of the World!" How sublime the meaning of the scene! For now the sweet pastoral seclusion of the Nativity, with its angelic songs and wondering shepherds, is broken by the contact of the great world. The vast stream of history, flowing down from the cradle of nations in the Orient, sweeps suddenly towards the cradle of Jesus. The past, with all its venerable traditions, the scattered races of mankind, the philosophy of the ages, the honour and power and wealth of earthly kingdoms, come thronging dimly in the train of these mysterious visitors to do homage to an infant on his mother's breast.

And when our world learns this lesson; when pride bows down to meekness, and experience does homage to innocence; when every child is reverenced as a royal heir of heaven because it is a brother of the Christ-child —then the Epiphany will come, and a great light will lighten the nations.

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

Thou wayfaring Jesus, a pilgrim and stranger,
Exiled from heaven by love at thy birth,
Exiled again from thy rest in the manger,
A fugitive child 'mid the perils of earth—
Cheer with thy fellowship all who are weary,
Wandering far from the land that they love;
Guide every heart that is homeless and dreary
Safe to its home in thy presence above.

And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.

Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying,

In Ramah was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life.—St. Matthew, ii. 13–20.

I

MANY great travellers have visited Egypt, and many famous fugitives have found asylum there; but none so great or so famous as the little Child who was carried thither by his parents in the days of Herod the king. The story of their journey is told by the Evangelist Matthew, who says that after the visit of the Magi, Joseph had a dream in which he saw an angel warning him to save the child Jesus from the envious wrath of Herod by fleeing into Egypt, and that he acted upon the warning promptly, going away from Bethlehem by night, and remaining in Egypt until Herod was dead.

Nothing could be more likely than that Joseph should have such a dream after the Magi had departed; for he knew, as all the inhabitants of Judea had reason to know, the black, jealous, bloody temper of King Herod, and how quick and cruel he was to put any fancied rival out of the way. His own children and his favourite wife Mariamne were butchered by his command because he was afraid of them; and such an incident as the homage of the Wise Men to the child Jesus, coming to his ears, would certainly have aroused his malignant fear. It was natural that Joseph's sleep should be troubled with some dark pre-

sentiment of the slaughter of the innocents at Bethlehem, and that he should be ready to heed the angel's exhortation to speedy flight. Everything was in favour of Egypt as the place of refuge. It was far beyond the reach of Herod's treacherous hand, and yet it was near enough to be easily gained. Three days would be sufficient to bring the travellers to the boundary between Egypt and Palestine, and once across it they would be safe. The gifts of the Magi had provided them with money for the journey. In Egypt they would find many colonies of Jews, among whom they would be kindly received and securely hidden. So they set out on their pilgrimage, this faithful Joseph and the mother Mary, with their sacred Child; with what company, if any, and in what manner of journeying, we know not, save that their departure was under the friendly cover of darkness; they passed safely through the mountains of Judea, and across the Philistine plain, and reached the friendly shelter of the land of the Sphinx, while Herod's fury of jealousy spent itself in vain upon the children of Bethlehem. And when the murderous king was dead, they returned from exile to their own country. That is the brief and simple history of the Flight.

But the poetry of it — how deep, how wonderful, how suggestive! Let any one who believes that Jesus was the Christ reflect upon the significance of this story — the strange contrast between the serene, musical night of the Nativity, and this troubled, threatening night of the journey; the adoration which was brought to the Child from far lands, and the perse-

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT—GIOTTO

From a fresco in the Chapel of the Arena, Padua

cution which followed him in his own country; the king of Heaven fleeing from the king of Judea; the utter helpless dependence of the little babe upon his parents during the long and weary journey; the mystery of his secret sojourn among the venerable temples and pyramids and dusty idolatries of old Egypt —surely the picture of the Holy Child would not be perfect without this weird shadow of peril and this experience of the hard vicissitudes of mortal life.

II

It was not possible, however, for the active imagination of the early Christians to rest content with St. Matthew's short and plain record of the Flight. They must know more about it — how the pilgrimage was made, through what places the Holy Family passed, what marvels and portents happened by the way, and where they found a resting-place. And so the literature of the Flight unfolded itself in the apocryphal gospels, and continued its growth through the poems and chronicles of the Middle Ages. Nothing can be more clear than the difference between the simple statement of St. Matthew that the journey was made —a statement which bears every mark of being historical, and reads as if it were merely a transcript of the Virgin Mary's remembrance of that hurried and dream-like episode — and the wild, fantastic fables of later times. And yet these fanciful stories, which were

told so often at the fireside, in the tent, at the resting-place of the reapers, and by the camp-fires of the caravan, have had considerable influence upon art.

Here is one, for example, from the *History of the Nativity of Mary*.

"And having come to a certain cave and wishing to rest in it, the blessed Mary dismounted from her beast, and sat down with the child Jesus in her bosom. And there were with Joseph three boys and with Mary a girl, going on the journey along with them. And lo! suddenly there came forth from the cave many dragons, and when the children saw them they cried out in great affright. Then Jesus went down from the bosom of his mother, and stood on his feet before the dragons; and they adored Jesus, and thereafter retired. But Mary and Joseph were very much afraid lest the child should be hurt by the dragons. And Jesus said to them: Do not be afraid, and do not consider me as a little child; for I am and always have been perfect, and all the beasts of the field must needs be tame before me." I do not know that any of the painters have ventured upon a representation of the dragons, but many of them, beginning with Giotto, have given us the three boys and the girl who had such a dreadful fright.

Another anecdote told by the same author has always been a favourite with the poets and painters. The Holy Family are resting beneath a date-palm, and Mary longs for some of the tempting fruit, which hangs high above her head. Joseph declares that he is too tired to climb the smooth stem of

FRESCO — NOTRE DAME D'ABONDANCE — THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

the tree. But the child Jesus knows his mother's wish, and at his command the branches bend downward to her hand. Then he thrusts his finger into the sand at the root of the tree, and a spring of water bursts forth. The next morning Jesus thanks the tree, saying, "This privilege I give thee, O palm-tree, that one of thy branches be carried away by my angels and planted in the Paradise of my Father. And this blessing will I confer upon thee, that it shall be said of all who conquer in any contest, You have won the palm of victory." Accordingly we may see in Correggio's "Madonna della Scodella," at Parma, the obedient tree and the spring, from which the Virgin

is dipping a bowl of water, while four charming angels are flying up to heaven with the palm branch.

There is another story which touches more upon the danger of the Flight. As the fugitives were departing from Bethlehem they passed some men in a field sowing corn. And the Virgin begged them to answer, if any one inquired when the Son of Man passed by, "When we were sowing this corn." Now it came to pass that same night that the corn sprang up and ripened so that on the morrow they were reaping it. And when the soldiers of Herod came and asked when the Son of Man passed by, the husbandmen answered, "As we were sowing this corn." So the soldiers thought that they could never overtake Him, and turned back from following. In a picture by Hans Memlinc in the Pinakothek at Munich these truthful and deceptive husbandmen appear in the background. There is a quaint addition to this legend, current among the northern Highlands of Scotland. It is said that a malicious little black beetle overheard the soldiers' question, and thrusting up his head, answered, "The Son of Man passed here last night." And this is the reason why the Highlanders stamp on the black beetle when they see it, saying, "Beetle, beetle, last night!"

The same thought of the danger of the journey has given rise to the various anecdotes of encounters with robbers. Sometimes it is a band of brigands lying in ambush; and as the Child draws near, they hear a great noise like the sound of a king approaching with horses and chariots, so that a panic seizes

THE REPOSE IN EGYPT — From a painting by Albrecht Altdorfer

them, and they run away without doing the harmless travellers any injury. Again, the Holy Family are taken prisoners by the captain of a company of brigands; but instead of cruelty he shows them kindness, carrying them to his own house, and entertaining them with the best of fare in his garden of fruit-trees. His good-wife helps to give the little Child a bath, and prudently saves the water. Some days later, when the hospitable brigand comes home from a skirmish fatally wounded, the same wonderful water heals him and restores him to life. At another time the travellers are stealing quietly past a band of robbers who have fallen asleep. But two of them, Titus and Dumachus, are roused by the noise. Dumachus wishes to awaken his comrades and capture the pilgrims; but Titus being of an amiable disposition, though a robber, bribes his companion with forty pieces of money and a girdle to keep still and let them escape, for which Mary blesses him, and Jesus foretells that after thirty years the two robbers shall be crucified with him, and Titus shall enter into Paradise as the penitent thief. These are very primitive stories, but they appear to indicate at least that the early Christians recognized a difference among thieves, and were willing to believe in the possibility of goodness dormant under the crust of evil.

There is another class of legends which centre in the idea of the divinity of Jesus. The Egyptian idols are represented as tumbling from their pedestals at his approach. A whole city of idols, whatever that may mean, is changed into a sand-hill as he passes by. And one very large and powerful idol, to which all the

others were accustomed to pay homage, cries out that Jesus is a greater God than any of them, and forthwith falls into a thousand fragments. All this is but a childish way of saying that the religion of Jesus destroys idolatry.

But the greatest fund of marvellous stories about the Flight is found in the Arabic *Gospel of the Infancy*, which was current among the Christians of the East, and was probably used by Mohammed in the composition of the Koran. It is an Oriental variation upon a sacred theme, an Asiatic embroidery full of all kinds of strange beasts, a sanctified Arabian Nights' Entertainment. It tells of a dumb bride restored to speech by taking the infant Jesus in her arms; and a crazy woman who would not wear any clothes brought to her right mind by the compassionate look of the Lady Mary; and a girl with the leprosy cleansed by washing in the water in which the Child had been bathed; and sundry other household miracles even more ingenuous and astonishing. It describes the dwelling-place of the Holy Family at Matarea, a town a little to the northeast of Cairo, where any sceptical person may still see the aged sycamore which sheltered them, and the "fountain of Mary," in which she washed her Child's coat. But the most wonderful tale of all is the story of the enchanted mule, which runs on this wise:

As the Holy Family were entering into a certain city they saw three women coming out of a cemetery, and weeping. And when the Lady Mary saw them, she said to the girl who accompanied her (the same

THE REPOSE

From an engraving by Lucas Cranach

who had been cleansed of her leprosy): "Ask them what is the matter, and what calamity has befallen them." But they made no reply to the girl's questions, asking her in their turn: "Whence are you? and whither are you going? For the day is spent, and night is coming on apace." "We are travellers," said the girl, "and are seeking a house of entertainment." They said: "Go with us, and spend the night with us." Accordingly the travellers accepted the courteous invitation, and were brought into a new house, richly furnished. Now it was winter, and the girl going into the apartment of these women, found them again weeping and lamenting. Beside them stood a mule, covered with housings of cloth of gold, and sesame was put before him, and the women were kissing him and feeding him. And the girl said: "What is all this ado, my ladies, about this mule?" They replied with tears: "This mule, which thou seest, was our brother, born of the same mother with ourselves. When our father died he left us great wealth, and this only brother. We did our best to get him married, and were preparing his nuptials after the fashion of our country. But some women, moved by jealousy, bewitched him, unknown to us; and one night, a little before daybreak, when the door of our house was shut, we saw that this our brother had been turned into a mule, as thou now beholdest him. And we are sorrowful, as thou seest, having no father to comfort us; and there is no wise man or magician in the world that we have omitted to send for, but nothing has done us any good." And when the girl heard

this, she said: "Be of good courage, ladies, and weep no more; for the cure of your calamity is near; yes, it is presently in your own house. For I also was a leper. But when I saw that woman, and along with her that young Child, whose name is Jesus, I sprinkled my body with the water wherein his mother had washed him, and I was cured. I know that he can deliver you from your affliction also. But arise, go to Mary my mistress, bring her into your own apartment, tell her your secret, and supplicate her to have pity upon you." When the women had listened to the girl's words they hastened to the Lady Mary and brought her into their chamber, and sat down before her, weeping and saying: "O our mistress, Lady Mary, have pity upon thy servants, for no one older than ourselves, no head of our family, is left — neither father nor brother — to live with us; but this mule which thou seest was our brother, whom women have bewitched into this condition. We beseech thee, therefore, to have pity upon us." Then, grieving at their misfortune, the Lady Mary took up the Lord Jesus and put him on the mule's back, and she wept with the women, and said to Jesus Christ, "Alas, my son, heal this mule by thy mighty power, and make him a reasonable man as he was before." And when these words were spoken, the shape of the mule was changed, and he became a young man of engaging appearance. Whereupon there was great joy in the household, and the grateful sisters immediately concluded to marry their brother to the girl who had been the means of bringing him so great a benefit.

THE HOME IN EGYPT—ALBRECHT DÜRER

From an engraving in "The Life of the Virgin"

All this, especially the happy marriage, is quite in the style of Scheherezade. It is no more like the sober records of the evangelists than a display of fireworks is like the silent stars; and the very difference goes far to prove, or at least to illustrate, the historical character of our four gospels.

III

The pictorial representations of this subject divide themselves into two classes. First we have the pictures of the Flight itself. These may be easily recognized by the presence of Joseph and Mary, evidently going on a journey, with their Child, not yet two years old. If Jesus is older, and able to walk by the side of Joseph, the picture represents the Return. Sometimes the painter puts a sketch of the massacre of the innocents into the background, to remind us of the occasion of the Flight. Thus it appears in Peruzzi's fresco in the Church of San Onofrio at Rome. Sometimes he makes an angel showing the way, as in a painting of the school of Domenichino at Naples. Now the Holy Family are seen going through a gloomy forest, as in a black little etching by Rembrandt, where one can hardly distinguish anything except the lantern which Joseph carries in his hand. Now they are embarking in a boat, as in a painting by Poussin; and again they are floating on the sea, fanned along by angels, as in a very feeble and affected picture by a

Frenchman whose name I have forgotten (and it is of no consequence). Usually Joseph is leading the ass, while Mary rides upon it, with the child in her arms. But sometimes the situation is reversed. There is a finely finished little picture by Adrian van der Werff in the Louvre, which shows Mary walking ahead carrying the child; she is about to cross a stream on stepping-stones, and turns to give her hand to Joseph, who is very old, and seems almost afraid to follow, while the ass, coming last of all, pulls back vigorously. In the same gallery I remember having seen a charming landscape by Adam Elzheimer, in which the Holy Family appear to have crossed a broad, shallow stream sparkling in the moonlight. Joseph carries a torch in one hand, and with the other he is giving a little branch to the child for a whip. On the edge of the woods in the background some shepherds have kindled a blazing fire, and there the travellers evidently intend to seek their rest. The picture is thus illuminated with three kinds of light, yet it is perfectly harmonious, and suggests very picturesquely the "camping out" aspect of the Flight.

The second class of pictures represent the Repose, either at some halting-place by the way, or in the home at Matarea. The subject came into vogue at the end of the fifteenth century. But by the middle of the sixteenth century this theme had become even more popular than the Flight; it was painted by Titian and Paul Veronese and Correggio, by Murillo at least five times, by Rubens and Van Dyck and Rembrandt and Ferdinand Bol, by Claude Lorraine and Nicolas Pous-

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT—MURILLO

From a painting at the Hermitage, St. Petersburg

sin, by Overbeck and Decamps, and among the latest representations of it is the picture by Knaus in the Metropolitan Museum at New York—a painting which is far from lofty in its tone, but which fascinates the public with its throng of plump and merry little angels. It is not always easy to recognize this subject; sometimes a painter like Claude gives us simply a broad landscape with a few tiny figures in one corner, and calls it a Repose; or again, as in the sad but lovely picture by Decamps, we see only a group of tired people with a little child, resting under the shadow of some trees, in dark silhouette against the evening sky. But as a rule the Repose is marked by at least one feature taken from the old legends — the fountain, the palm-tree, a company of angels singing and dancing to amuse the Holy Child. The painter tries to make his picture tell the story of rest after a weary journey. And always, if he knows anything about his subject, he leaves out the familiar figures which appear in other representations of the Holy Family. Wherever you find St. Anna, or St. Elizabeth, or the little St. John, you may know that the picture is not, properly speaking, a *Riposo*.

And now we may turn for a moment to look more closely at our illustrations of this episode in the life of the child Jesus. There are nine of them — five represent the Flight, and four the Repose. Two of them, at least, take a high rank among the pictures belonging to the child life of Jesus; and altogether they cover the history of Christian art for more than five centuries, and show the different methods of fresco, oil-painting, and engraving.

First comes Giotto; and rightly, for he was the first man who ventured to paint the life of Christ as a reality. This fresco is one of those that make the walls of the little Chapel of the Arena in Padua more precious than if they were covered with gold. It has suffered even more than its companions from the damp air of the surrounding garden; and much of that bright, pure colour which Giotto loved has vanished from its surface. But even in its decay it is admirable; it shows us how clearly the oldest of old masters caught the meaning of the history, and with what vigour and sincerity he was able to express it. We may laugh, if we will, at the impossible trees, and the wooden head of the ass, and the stiff, unjointed hands of the people. These were things which Giotto did not understand very well, nor did he care much about them. But he did understand how to tell us that the journey was anxious and hurried, and altogether a very serious undertaking; that even the dumb beast was dejected and weary; that the boys and the girl who went along with the Holy Family talked a good deal by the way; and that Joseph chose the boy who could see the angel to lead the ass by the bridle; and that he himself could not help looking back continually to see if the mother and Child were safe; and that these two, Mary and Jesus, being together, were less troubled than the rest of the party—all this Giotto tells us in his plain, strong way. He has grasped the situation. He gives the drama of the Flight.

The next picture comes from a little ruined church, which is hidden away in the Alpine hamlet of Abon-

dance, among the mountains of Chablais, on the southern shore of Lake Geneva. The traveller who climbs up the valley of the Dranse from Evian to this forsaken spot will find the old abbey used as a stable, and these pale frescos crumbling from the walls. No one knows who painted them. Probably it was done in the fifteenth century by some travelling artist who went from place to place with his band of workmen to execute the orders of the monks. This was certainly the custom of the time, and the picture bears strong marks of Italian influence in the conventional treatment of Joseph's dream on the left, and the actual Flight on the right. But the interesting thing about it is its rude but graphic reproduction of the scenery of upper Savoy. These are the sharp-pointed hills and steep crags which rise around the village of Abondance; this peasant who is carrying a board covered with little round cheeses up a mountain path is a native of the district, and may still be seen there; this boat which two men are towing against the stream belongs to the river Dranse. It is still the drama of the Flight, but the colouring is distinctly local, and the artist has made the action subordinate to the scenery. And yet I think, upon the whole, the old master-designer gave the monks the worth of their money, even though he spared himself some expense by using gray instead of blue, which was the costliest of pigments.

We turn now from the atmosphere of Italy to that of Germany, and take three characteristic examples of Teutonic art in the early part of the sixteenth century.

These are all pictures of the Repose, and their manner is idyllic rather than dramatic. The weakest of the three is the painting by Albrecht Altdorfer, the versatile and prosperous city architect of Ratisbon. He has let his bizarre fancy run away with him, and overloaded his picture with details. Yet there is somthing original and pretty in the little angel swimming to meet the child Jesus, who leans from Mary's lap and dips his hand in the fountain. But what a fountain! It is a nightmare of the Renaissance.

Cranach's engraving is far more satisfactory, and better even than his own earlier sketch of the same subject. It is signed only with his crest—a dragon with a ring in its mouth—but its authenticity is undoubted. The Virgin is seated at the foot of a tree against which Joseph is leaning. The Child stands upon his mother's lap and offers her an apple. Twelve jolly cherubs are dancing in a ring before them, with every sign of delight, while two other cherubs are up in the tree robbing a nest and killing the young birds. This is a strange feature in such a peaceful scene. A recent writer has explained that the nest is an eagle's nest, and its destruction typifies the overthrow of the kingdom of Satan by Christ. But the old birds do not look in the least like eagles, and I suppose the artist intended the incident to be emblematic of the slaughter of the innocents at Bethlehem. It is a quaint conceit, but not very complimentary to the cherubic disposition.

Dürer's engraving, from the famous series of *The Life of the Virgin*, published in 1511, is altogether lovely and lovable. Merely as an example of early

IN THE SHADOW OF ISIS

From a drawing b Luc Olivie Merson

xylographic art it shows the hand of a master, strong, steady, direct. But when we enter into the thought and feeling of the picture we recognize even higher qualities. It is the home in Egypt. True, the architecture has a look of Nuremberg, and the miraculous fountain in the background flows through a wooden spout such as may have stood in the court-yard of Dürer's own house. But to the lowly heart there are no anachronisms. The thought of the artist dissolves the bonds of time. He will have us remember that home is home, wherever it may be, and that the love of Joseph and Mary could make a safe and happy place for the child Jesus even in exile. So the honest carpenter toils away at his trade, while the cheerful cherubs bustle around to help him. Mary sits near by with distaff and spindle, quietly working, and with her foot rocking the cradle in which little Jesus lies asleep. Even the angels do not disturb her placid soul. The picture is a song in praise of industry and love; it is an idyl of the joy of home even in a far land. Blessed is the child who finds such shelter amid the tumult and strife of the world!

Murillo's Flight, which is in the Hermitage at St. Petersburg, is painted in a very tender spirit, and full of feeling. The drawing in the lower part of the picture is not very secure, but the faces of Joseph and Mary, bending together over the Child, are touched with beautiful solicitude and deep love. They forget the weariness of the journey in their delight in Jesus, and the Child, pure and peaceful, as Murillo always conceives him, looks up with bright wonder at the an-

gels above his head. A soft warm air envelops the group, and seems to waft them all gently onward. It is a bit of sentiment, almost passing into *Schwärmerei;* but, after all, it is pure and noble—a celestial reverie.

Three pictures of this subject, all produced within the present generation, may be taken as illustrations of the different ways in which the modern spirit deals with the life of the child Jesus.

M. Pierre Lagarde's painting of the Flight is a lyric set in a minor key. The thought which has impressed him is the loneliness of the journey. There are no angels in the sky. The wide desert shows no sign of life, save this poor little household wandering on through the trackless waste. The slender Virgin droops like a wilted flower, Joseph's steps are heavy and slow, and the Child sleeps on his mother's arm. This plaintive *ballade* is all that the artist has found in the story of the Flight.

M. Merson's striking sketch of the Repose is far more suggestive. He is not, indeed, the first to introduce distinctly Egyptian features into the landscape, for I believe Poussin attempted this, in his cold, vague way, several times. But M. Merson is the first to do it accurately and thoughtfully. This drawing, slight as it is, is worthy of the man who, when he was painting the encounter of "St. Francis and the Wolf of Gubbio," travelled all the way from Rome to Gubbio in order to get his landscape true to nature. Even more noteworthy is the way in which he has touched upon the dim foreshadowing of the story of Jesus in the mythology of ancient Egypt. The Virgin, shel-

FRUI
OF L
INN
W
Hunt

tered in a corner of a ruined temple, and holding her Child at her breast, looks up in amazement, and sees upon the gray stones beside her the gigantic outline of "Isis, the good mother, the faithful nurse, suckling her son Horus." What thoughts of wonder and of fear must have passed her heart! It is a miracle, a marvel, this strange coincidence, but a marvel altogether in the manner of the curious, complex nineteenth century. This picture is in fact the modern version of the old story of the conquered idols. They do not tumble from their places in ruinous dismay at the approach of Jesus, but they stand crumbling in sculptured impotence above the living Child, whose divine force is to go out as light and life to the uttermost parts of the earth and the end of time. And if there was aught of good in their vanishing worship, any conception of holy love and sacred maternity and redemptive power, all this was taken up and purified and consummated in the religion of Jesus.

Mr. Holman Hunt's magnificent painting of the Flight is undoubtedly the greatest in the series, and to my mind the most important religious picture of the century. It is impossible to get any just idea of it from an engraving, however faithful and painstaking, nor shall I dare to describe its opulence of colour, its glorious mysteries of light, the grandeur, simplicity, and vigour of its style. I remember well the days that I spent before it in the summer of 1886, when it was exhibited in London, and again in the painter's studio in 1892, when he was repainting the head of the Virgin, and the hours were cheered with beautiful talk

about his life in Palestine, where the picture was conceived. The rich bloom of the landscape, the garlands of heavenly human children, the joyous radiance of the infant Jesus, made it seem like a dream, full of real forms, lucid and beautiful and bright with rainbow hues, yet tremulous with mystical meaning, and ready to vanish at a breath into the circumambient night. This is the wonder of the picture; its realism is so intense and its mysticism is so deep, and both are blended together in the unity of a vision. Nothing could be more solid and life-like than the painting of Joseph, with his bronzed, muscular limbs, and the basket of tools on his back. The ass, intelligent and strong, has all the marks of the high-bred Mecca race. The flowers are those that star the plains of Palestine in early spring, each one painted with such loving care that it seems to blossom forever. Moon-threads—filmy beams—weave a veil of light over the trees and distant hills of Judah. The wreaths of children are full of natural, human grace, brighter and more lovely than any of Donatello's or Luca della Robbia's. Years of patient toil have been spent upon the canvas to give it reality, and make it true at every point where truth was possible. But beyond all this, and above it — nay, breathing through every careful line and glowing colour — is the soul, the spirit of the picture, which irradiates it with

> "The light that never was on sea or land,
> The consecration, and the poet's dream."

The painter has expressed his meaning in the title

of the picture. It is called "The Triumph of the Innocents." And this is the thought which he has immortalized.

The spirits of the murdered children of Bethlehem —not a great multitude, as they are often thoughtlessly depicted, but a little band such as really played in that little village—have followed after Jesus on his flight. Joseph is turning back anxiously to watch the signal-fires which burn upon the hills. Mary is busied in readjusting the garments which had been hastily thrown about her infant at the departure. But the Holy Child looks round, and seeing the spirits of his playmates, welcomes them with the gladness of a divine sympathy. The hand which He stretches out to them holds a few ears of wheat, the symbol of the bread of life. These children are the first of his glorious band of martyrs, and as they draw near to Him, the meaning of their martyrdom flashes upon them, and their sorrow is changed into joy. The last group of little ones have not yet felt his presence, and the pain and terror of mortality are still heavy upon them. Over the head of one the halo is just descending. A little farther on a circle of flower-decked boys and girls are bringing the tired foal up to its mother's side. One baby saint looks down, amazed to see that the scar of the sword has vanished from his breast. In front floats a trio of perfectly happy spirits, one carrying a censer and singing, the others casting down branches of the palm and the vine. At their feet rolls the river of life, breaking into golden bubbles, in which the glories of the millennium are reflected.

All mystical, symbolical, visionary! But is it not also true? Think for a moment. It is the religion of Jesus that has transfigured martyrdom and canonized innocence. It is the religion of Jesus that tells us of a heaven full of children, and a kingdom which is to bring heaven down to earth. And so long as the religion of Jesus lives, it will mean help and blessing to the martyred innocents of our race — the children who are oppressed in slavery, and neglected in want, and crushed by human avarice and ambition and cruelty in the wheels of the great world—help and blessing to these little ones in the name and for the sake of the holy child Jesus.

THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS

Oh! say not, dream not, heavenly notes
To childish ears are vain,
That the young mind at random floats,
And cannot reach the strain.

Was not our Lord a little child,
Taught by degrees to pray,
By father dear and mother mild
Instructed day by day?

JOHN KEBLE.

And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.

And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.

But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.

And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?

And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.—Luke, ii. 40–52.

I

THERE are some who find it difficult to think that Jesus ever had a real and true childhood. They cannot see how one who appeared before the world with such divine authority and fulfilled his mission so sublimely could ever have been

> "A simple child
> That lightly draws its breath.'

The lowly birth in the stable at Bethlehem they accept; the supreme ministry of Christ among men they accept; but that there was a time between, an early morning-tide of soft light and gentle dews of grace and joy, when the soul of Jesus, unfolding like a flower, increased in wisdom and beauty towards perfection—this seems to them difficult to believe without endangering his supreme dignity. They would rather represent Him as entering life complete and perfect, equipped with all knowledge and power, even as Minerva in the heathen legend sprang full-armed from the brain of Jove.

But the evangelist Luke, who must surely have thought as reverently and devoutly of Christ's supremacy as any man could think, does not seem to have

felt this difficulty; for he says, "And the child grew, and waxed strong, becoming full of wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him."

This is a very brief record to cover such an important period of life as that which lies between infancy and the twelfth year; and yet, brief as it is, how clearly it illuminates the vital truth. Growth is the key-word of the passage. Growth is the wonder and the glory of all childhood. Growth was the beautiful secret of the childhood of Jesus.

It is a marvellous thing to see even a plant grow. If we were watching for the first time the unfolding of stalk and leaf and bloom and fruit from a tiny seed, we should call it a gradual miracle. How does that invisible and regnant principle in the germ draw the earth and the air, the water and the light into its life and mould them to its ideal form? It is a mystery. But how much more mysterious is the growth of a child. The double development, physical and spiritual; the dawn of intelligence in the vague eyes; the motions of will in the fluttering hands; the limbs rounding to symmetry and strength; the face lighting up with thought and feeling, the formation of character with distinct affections and desires; the mastery of language which reveals the character to the ear, and of action which reflects it to the eye; the advance in knowledge, apparently so slow, yet often in reality so swift below the surface, reaching out in secret, feeling its way where we cannot follow it, towards the beautiful surprise of the first manifestation of true wisdom, when the child says suddenly, and as if by revelation,

THE ORLÉANS MADONNA — RAPHAEL

From the painting in the Art Gallery at Chantilly

"I feel my duty, I know what I must do—" all this is surely one of the most marvellously lovely and inexplicable things in the world. And it is just this that the evangelist assures us came to pass in the life of Jesus.

It cannot be explained in Him any more than in other children. It must have been more wonderful in Him than in other children by so much as the final perfection of his wisdom and power rises above all human standards. But it was no less real. He did not return from the flight into Egypt as a premature sage, a miracle-working magician in the disguise of an infant, to wait at Nazareth until the time came for Him to make his public appearance. He was brought back by his parents as a little child, to grow up in the shelter of a loving home. He thought as a child, while He learned his letters and began to read in the Holy Scriptures of his people, standing beside his mother's knee. He felt as a child, while he wandered and played with his cousin, the little St. John, in the blossomy fields of Galilee. He spake as a child, while He walked with Mary and Joseph, or sat in the carpenter-shop helping a little and hindering a little with the work, but bringing into the daily life of the labouring man that innocent and uplifting charm which comes from companionship with a gentle boy.

There does not appear to have been anything violent or startling in the development of his personality. It went forward gradually and imperceptibly. The evangelist suggests this by the solitary incident which he relates of Christ's early years.

When his parents had taken Him at the age of twelve, according to the Jewish custom, to his first Passover in Jerusalem, and had lost Him in the crowd, and sought Him in vain, and found Him at last in one of the little groups which used to gather in the Temple courts around the teachers of the law, none were so much amazed at his presence there as Mary and Joseph. His answer to their gentle reproaches, "How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" suddenly disclosed to them the change which had taken place in their Child so secretly that they knew it not. He had crossed the hidden threshold. He had heard the still voice which spoke to Him of his place, his duty, his work in the world. He had come within sight of the truth that for Him the questions that have to do with religion must be of chief concern, so that he could rightly forget all other interests, and be lost and absorbed in the preparation for his ministry. The self-denials and hardships which must have been involved for a boy of twelve in three days' absence from his parents in order to listen to the teachers of religion were in fact the first of that long series of self-sacrifices which culminated on Calvary. He did not arrive at it magically, by a leap from infancy to maturity. He grew up to it through long and beautiful years of slow increase, through the wonder and awe of new thoughts dawning with every morning, and new affections deepening with every evening, and a soul enlarging as the silent influence of grace filled it more and more. And it was for this reason that they could not understand it, be-

cause they were his parents, because they lived so close to Him that it seemed incredible that this change should have taken place without their knowledge, because the hardest of all things for parents to believe is that the childhood of their child has really passed away.

II

If we are right, then, in reading the authentic record of the early years of Christ after this simple and natural fashion, what shall we make of those unauthentic legends that are contained in the apocryphal books? They must seem to us very absurd and barbarous, the tawdry inventions of a poverty-stricken fancy, which really spoil the story they are intended to adorn. They are full of childish and ridiculous miracles. They represent Christ as a precocious Rabbi who takes the words out of his teacher's mouth and reproves those who would instruct Him. They even describe Him, with curiously blind irreverence, as using Almighty power to ensure the success of his childish games and to punish his companions when they thwart or offend Him. Now and then one lights upon little touches of nature among these legends, as when the child Jesus is represented as bringing water for his mother from the well, or going with his father to his work in the city. But even these are spoiled by the miraculous additions. The pitcher which Jesus is carrying is broken, and He brings the water in the

corner of his robe. The couch which Joseph is making for a rich customer is too short, and Jesus takes hold of the wood at one end and pulls it out to a proper length.

Many of the pretended wonders are less innocent than these. A single example, from the Greek form of *Thomas the Israelite Philosopher's Account of the Infancy of Our Lord*, will be enough to show the quality of this literature:

"This child Jesus, when five years old, was playing in the ford of a mountain stream; and He collected the flowing waters into pools and made them clear immediately; and by a word alone He made them obey Him. And having made some soft clay He fashioned out of it twelve sparrows. And it was the Sabbath when He did these things. And there were also many other children playing with Him. And a certain Jew, seeing what Jesus was doing, playing on the Sabbath, went off immediately, and said to his father, Joseph: Behold thy son is at the stream and has taken clay, and has made of it twelve birds, and has profaned the Sabbath. And Joseph, coming to the place and seeing, cried out to Him: Wherefore doest thou on the Sabbath what it is not lawful to do? And Jesus clapped his hands, and said to the sparrows: Off you go! And the sparrows flew, and went off, crying. And the Jews seeing this were amazed, and went away and reported to their chief men what they had seen Jesus doing.

"And the son of Annas the scribe was standing there with Joseph; and he took a willow branch and let out the waters which Jesus had collected. And Jesus see-

THE CHILD JESUS IN THE FIELDS — ALFRED BRAMTOT

ing what was done was angry, and said to him: O wicked, impious, and foolish! what harm did the pools or the waters do thee? Behold even now thou shalt be dried up like a tree, and thou shalt not bring forth either leaves or branches or fruit. And straightway that boy was quite dried up. And Jesus departed and went to Joseph's house. But the parents of the boy that had been dried up took him up, bewailing his youth, and brought him to Joseph, and reproached him because, said they, Thou hast a child doing such things."

It seems incredible that any one should ever have invented or believed such a worthless story as this. It is far worse than the playful and often pretty legends which the uninspired fancy of the early centuries wove about the Nativity and the Adoration of the Magi; for they were harmless; but this is distinctly immoral. It is really an expression of that deeply-rooted heresy which troubled the early Church and still survives in other forms to-day—the falsehood which ascribes the supremacy of Christ and the excellency of God to unlimited power rather than to perfect love. I have quoted it merely in order that we might feel more sharply the contrast between a false gospel and a true one, and turn back with new delight to the candour and lucidity and divine naturalness of St. Luke's outline of the childhood of Jesus.

III

But if legend gives us no real help in filling out the outline of Christ's childhood, art is all the more rich and generous. No part of the gospel history has been more abundantly and beautifully illustrated than this single verse of St. Luke, telling us in a word how quietly the life of Jesus unfolded in the home at Nazareth.

The theme, which the verse gives so clearly, is the growth of a Holy Child. Around this theme a multitude of the greatest artists have woven innumerable harmonies and variations, teaching us to remember how many influences must enter into the development of such a child in God's world. They have wisely discarded the use of all those miraculous tales which are so foreign to the truth of the story. There are but few pictures in which even the most distant allusion to the apocryphal accounts of Christ's boyhood can be traced, and none of them are by great masters. They have not attempted to add any definite historical details to the narrative. They have left it still vague and free, a suggestion rather than a chronicle. But into their conception of the dawning of that life which rose to be the light of men, they have brought all that they knew of innocent beauty, and fresh joy in birds and flowers, and glad companionship of merry playmates, and sacred intimacies of home, and delight of new thoughts gathered from nature and from books, and sweet, satisfying devotion of mother-love. They have surrounded the Christ-child with angels

LA BELLE JARDINIÈRE — RAPHAEL

From the painting in the Louvre

singing, or playing on lutes and viols, remembering, perhaps from the looks of their own children, that

"Beauty born of murmuring sound,"

which passes into the listening face, and those secret visitations of inconceivable awe which make the childish eyes look far away, beholding the unseen. All this they have put into the childhood of Jesus, unhesitatingly and with perfect confidence, as if a voice had said to them, "Look into thine own heart, and paint."

For this sacred instinct of art there is abundant historical justification. I do not suppose that the painters thought of seeking for it; but if they had, they would have found good ground for believing that the child Jesus, living in a devout Hebrew household in the little town of Nazareth, must have enjoyed the four great blessings of childhood:

A pure and peaceful home, ruled by love and piety.

A fresh and simple life, in close contact with nature.

A joyous fellowship with other children.

A patient and reverent education.

The Jewish people have always been distinguished for their loving care of child-life, and for the strength of their family feeling. We have an unconscious evidence of this in the eight distinct names used in the Hebrew language to mark the different periods of a child's growth. All the traditions of the race were in favour of the sanctities of the home, and their Holy Scriptures hedged it about and hallowed it by the authority of Jehovah himself. Whether the house of Joseph and Mary was but a humble cottage, or a dwell-

ing of comparative comfort (and we can argue nothing on this point from the fact that Joseph was a carpenter, for every Jewish man, rich or poor, learned a trade), we may be sure that Jesus was nurtured in that atmosphere of mutual affection and intimate joy which is the true air of home.

Moreover, it was a happy circumstance that this home was in Galilee. For although that northern province was despised by the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as being rude in speech and rustic in manners, life there was far more free and natural than it was in Judea, where the yoke of ceremonialism pressed heavily upon the people, and their spirit seemed to reflect something of the sombreness of the landscape. Galilee was fair and smiling. The vine and the olive flourished there; the Rabbis said "it was easier to rear a forest of olive-trees in Galilee than one child in Judea." There was something of the same difference, I suppose, in the country and the people, between Galilee and Judea, that there is in Italy between Tuscany and Umbria. And certainly childhood must have been happier and more untrammelled in the merrier land, where the face of nature, if less grand and awe-inspiring, wore a brighter and more benignant aspect, and where life was less closely bound by rules and restrictions. The little town of Nazareth lies in a high valley. "Fifteen gently rounded hills," says a modern traveller, "seem as if they met to form an enclosure for this peaceful basin. They rise round it like the edge of a shell to guard it from intrusion. It is a rich and beautiful field abounding in gay flowers, in fig-trees, small gardens, hedges of

THE VIRGIN AND CHILD WITH ST. JOHN — BOTTICELLI

From the painting in the Louvre

the prickly-pear; and the dense rich grass affords an abundant pasture." The well of water which tradition points out as the scene of the angel's visit to the Virgin Mary still flows in the open green space at the end of the town, and the women, fairer than the other daughters of Palestine, come thither to draw, and the children in their bright robes play around it. There can be little doubt that the child Jesus found innocent joys beside that fountain and in those verdant pastures. The intimacy with the world out-of-doors which his later teaching shows, his love for birds and flowers, his close observation of natural objects, the fondness with which He turned for rest to the lonely hill-sides and the waters of the lake, all speak of one of those deep and sincere friendships with nature which can only be begun in their lasting perfection by a child.

The simplicity of the Galilean life must have been favourable also to those pleasures of human intercourse that are tasted most perfectly by children free from care. It is not likely that the parents of Jesus were rich enough to impose on Him the burden of a luxurious and artificial life, which often makes childhood so unhappy. Once at least, after He was a man, He spoke in a way which showed his familiarity with the childish games of the market-place. The warmth and devotion of his friendships reveal a heart that did not grow reserved in early solitude. A natural companion of his boyish pleasures would be his cousin, the child of Zacharias and Elizabeth, who afterwards became John the Baptist. The painters have made no error when they have so often depicted the child Jesus and the young

St. John playing together with lambs or birds beside flowing streams.

But we may be sure that the education of the Child was not neglected, for on this point the Jewish law was strict. Religion was the chief factor in education, and doubtless it was begun by the mother, who would explain to her son the meaning of the many pious rites and customs observed in the household, like the lighting of the Sabbath lamp, and the touching, by every one who passed in or out of the house, of the parchment on the door-post with the Divine Name written on it. The fascinating stories of the Old Testament would be the charms by which she would hold Him listening in her arms. She would teach Him passages of Scripture to recite from memory. From the same sacred pages He would learn his letters. When He was five or six years old He would be sent to school to sit on the floor with the other boys around the teacher and receive instruction, the Scriptures remaining his only text-book until he was ten years old. Whether there was a school in Nazareth at the time of Christ we do not know, for the introduction of universal and compulsory education throughout the land did not occur until a later period. But, however that may have been, it is certain that the devotion of such parents as Mary and Joseph would not neglect the duties of instruction; and we may confidently say of Jesus, as St. Paul said of his disciple, Timothy, that "from a child he knew the Holy Scriptures."

Let us see, then, how these four golden threads of home-life, and intercourse with nature, and happy com-

THE HOLY FAMILY — PINTURICCHIO

From the painting in the Academy at Sienna

panionship, and holy instruction, have been woven by the artists into their thought of the childhood of Christ.

The works of art which depict the subject are almost innumerable. We cannot include here those pictures of the Madonna and Child in which Jesus is still a little babe clinging to his mother or nursing at her breast; nor the altar-pieces in which they are enthroned between attendant saints, although one of these, "La Sistina," contains the most glorious image of the Christ-child that the world has ever seen. But all those representations of the Madonna and Child in which Jesus is older, and especially those in which there is some significant action between Him and his mother, belong to this class. Here I should place, for example, the much admired "round Madonna" of Botticelli, in the Uffizi at Florence, where Mary is writing the words of her hymn in a book which angels hold before her, while the Child looks up in her face and lays his hand upon hers, as if to draw it to Himself. In the same class belong the Madonnas of Dürer and many other painters in which the mother is giving the Child a pear or an apple to play with, and the Madonna Colonna, in the Berlin Museum, where Mary is reading and the Child distracts her attention by pulling at the bosom of her dress.

A charming picture of this type is Raphael's small Madonna of the Orleans family, in the art gallery at Chantilly. It was painted at a time when Raphael's manner was changing, and bears evidence of having been often retouched and altered. The little shelf with porcelain vessels in the background indicates that it is

an in-door scene, which is an unusual thing with this master. He seems to have been trying to express a purely domestic sentiment in the simplest forms. But unlike the German masters, who would have been satisfied with mere homeliness, Raphael was not content until he could reduce his idea to an essentially lucid and graceful and symmetrical form. The Child, who seems to be about a year and a half old, and has that face of Divine seriousness which Raphael rendered so perfectly, is trying to lift himself up to his mother's breast, while she bends over Him, half tenderly and half playfully, with a look of motherly denial. The picture suggests very delicately the growth of the Child, and the sweet cares of maternity. Other artists carry the thought further on and more into detail; not always with much artistic power, but often with a very attractive sentiment. I remember a sunny little bit of painting by Francesco Trevisiani in one of the small rooms of the Uffizi, which represents the Virgin seated by her window sewing, with her hand raised drawing the thread, while the Child, about five years old, comes running in with a passion-flower which He gives to his mother.

The introduction of the young St. John into the picture brings in a new element of life. Sometimes the two children are playing together, alone or surrounded by angels. This is the theme which has been so prettily treated by some of the painters of the seventeenth century: Murillo, Van Dyck, Rubens, Guido Reni. But the most famous pictures of the two children represent them with the Virgin Mary. In this

THE HOLY FAMILY — FRANZ DEFREGGER

From the painting in the village church at Dölsach

class we find five of Raphael's most exquisite Madonnas: the Madonna of the Green Fields, in the Belvidere at Vienna; the Madonna of the Goldfinch in the Uffizi, and the Madonna of the Chair in the Pitti, at Florence; the Madonna of the Diadem, and the Madonna called "La Belle Jardinière," in the Louvre at Paris.

The last of these pictures, which illustrates Raphael's second, or Florentine manner, is said to have received its name from the tradition that the painter employed a flower-girl as his model for the Virgin. But whether or not it has any real connection with the memory of "a gardener's daughter," it suggests the thought that the childhood of Jesus was like a quiet garden in which the fairest flower that ever bloomed on earth was tended by a daughter of the Most High. The landscape is in harmony with the thought; soft and fragile blossoms star the elastic sod; the slender trees are clad in the misty foliage of spring; a light haze rests over the village, the blue mountains, and the sleeping lake in the distance; the sky, paler around the horizon, grows deep blue towards the zenith; and a few fleecy clouds are floating lazily overhead. Raphael embodied in this picture all that he had learned of subtle expressiveness from Lionardo, and of symmetrical composition from Fra Bartolommeo. The picture is suffused with the mysterious air of thought; the pyramid of the three figures is perfect; yet all this is accomplished with such perfect art that the simplicity of the picture is not destroyed. The young mother is seated on a little hillock, dressed so modestly that one forgets to notice it.

Even the awkward blue mantle which Ghirlandajo added to the painting after Raphael had left it unfinished, does not destroy the virginal grace of her figure. She has been reading aloud from a book, and now bends her pale golden head towards her son, who stands at her knee. The little St. John has come to ask the child Jesus to play with him. He is half-kneeling, and looking at Jesus with the greatest affection, not unmingled with that strange reverence of which children are singularly capable in their friendships, and which has a mystical significance in St. John's case as the foreshadowing of his subsequent testimony to Jesus as the Messiah. But Jesus turns from his playmate. He stands in an attitude of loveliest confidence, with one of his feet resting on the bare foot of the Virgin, his right hand pressed against her knee with a caressing motion, his left hand stretched out to the book in her lap, looking up in her face with a smile of ineffable trust and love, as if He would say, "Let us stay with you, dear mother, and hear you read again." It is the sense of a beautiful moment that Raphael has preserved for us with that sensitive and tranquil art which was the true expression of his soul—a moment beautiful with all that is most fresh and bright in nature and most serene in mother-love –a moment beautiful because it is transient, passing away as the delicate charm of spring is lost in the full tide of summer, yet woven forever into the character and growth of the Christ-child.

Botticelli's "Madonna and Child," in the Louvre, has another sentiment and a very different attractiveness.

Here the roses are in full bloom, and the leaves and flowers are clearly outlined at the top of the dark hedge against the brilliant evening sky. It is twilight also in the Virgin's heart—the hour when the sweetness of the present is often mingled with vague apprehensions of coming sorrow—and the Virgin's face is sad and drooping with that ineffable melancholy which Botticelli understood and loved. She has been reading, perhaps, in the book which now lies closed before her, the prophecies that foretell suffering to the Messiah, and she feels the burden of her mysterious relation to Him. She is the type of all those sadly thoughtful mother-hearts who know that the deepest love means the possibility of the sharpest anguish, and tremble tenderly for the future of their beloved. But the Child is her comforter, as so many a child has soothed away the silent troubles and anxieties of so many a mother. He lifts his face to hers and puts his hand softly in her neck, with a touch which seems like the infantile beginning of his great ministry of consolation to the weary and heavy-laden.

The Holy Family, in which Mary and Joseph with the Child form the invariable elements of the group, and other figures (St. John the Baptist; St. Anna, the mother of the Virgin; St. Elizabeth, her cousin; and sometimes Zebedee and Mary Salome, the parents of the Apostle John) are added according to the choice of the painter or his patrons, is one of the most frequent subjects in Christian Art. It has been painted in many different keys of feeling, from the dreamy mysticism of Perugino to the joyous naturalism of Andrea del

Sarto and Guido Romano, in whose pictures of the bathing of Jesus one can almost hear the water splash and the children laugh.

An illustration of a mode of treating the subject in which a strong element of realism is curiously blended with devotional sentiment so churchly as to make the picture almost formal, is the Holy Family by Franz Defregger, a painter of this century who has won great fame in Austria, and indeed throughout the world, by his scenes from Tyrolese peasant life. He painted this picture as an offering of love for the village church at Dölsach in the upper valley of the Drau, where he was born. I climbed up to see it one summer evening after a day of lonely fishing on a neighbouring stream. There was a festival of some kind in progress; the hamlet was full of people in gala dress; and there was an incessant firing of guns and cannon from the shooting-range on the hill. Entering the church, I found it crowded to the door with the peasants, and resonant with their simple, hearty singing. The picture hung before them at the left of the chancel. The Virgin, dressed in dark crimson with a white scarf over her head and shoulders, was a type of that serious, innocent, noble beauty which is often seen among the women of Norway and the Tyrol. The Child, standing on her knee and looking out with dark, wondering eyes, was a village child idealized. Joseph, a strong and thoughtful man, plain and toil-worn, pondering over an ancient book of prophecy, represented the humble piety of a peasantry which still remains devout. The painting was in fact composed of native elements, and the successful artist had sent it

THE CHILD JESUS TAUGHT BY HIS MOTHER — LUC OLIVIER MERSON

back from his prosperous life in Vienna, in a spirit of beautiful loyalty, to bear his part in the worship of the rustic church where he had sung and prayed as a boy.

In most of the pictures of the Holy Family we find a symbolical motive introduced. When Jesus and the young St. John are playing with a lamb, the allusion is to St. John's later testimony, "Behold the Lamb of God," and these words are often written upon a scroll around the cross-handled staff which he carries. When one of the children is bringing a bird to the other it typifies the human soul led by St. John to Christ. The bath, in which St. John pours the water upon Jesus, is a symbol of the Baptism. When the Holy Family are seated under a vine and grapes are offered to the Child, it is a prophecy of the saying, "I am the vine." The pomegranate which the Child sometimes presents to his mother is the emblem of hope, and the other fruits with which He plays are typical of the fruits of the spirit, which are love, joy, peace. But frequently the symbolical purpose of the picture is quite lost and forgotten in the delight which the painter has found in representing an actual scene from the domestic life of Jesus.

A beautiful illustration of this is Pinturicchio's circular panel in the Academy of Fine Arts at Sienna. The picture is about three feet in diameter, full of elaborate detail, careful drawing, and rich colour; it is a gem of the Umbrian school of art just touched with a faint suggestion of that more realistic spirit which distinguished Pinturicchio from his partner Perugino. The Virgin, fair-haired and gracious, is seated at the left, with an open book upon her knee, and her right hand

lifted, beckoning. Joseph, a man of thoughtful, rugged face, sits beside her, holding a roll of bread and one of those little flat wine-casks which one sees so often in Italy. These are intended to remind us that he was what the old-fashioned New England housewives call "a good provider," which is high praise for a husband. But the interest of the picture centres in the two charming children. St. John, in his tunic of camel's hair, carries a small water-pitcher in his hand. Jesus, a golden-haired boy of about four years, is dressed in a robe of pure white, embroidered on the bosom with a square of deep blue, like the high-priest's breast-plate, and carries a crimson book clasped in his left hand. The right is thrust through the arm of St. John with a joyous and natural gesture of companionship, and we can almost hear the Child say, "Come, let us run to the spring." The fountain sparkles from a rock near by, and of course it is the emblem of the water of life. And yet I think the real charm of the picture lies in the merriment of the two children running so light-heartedly away from the Virgin's knee across the flower-besprinkled grass, as if their expedition were a fine adventure.

Another very significant conception of the Holy Family is that in which the education of the Child is the central thought. In these pictures the Virgin Mary is usually the teacher. Joseph watches them in an attitude of deep reverence, as in the curiously strong and thoughtful painting by Signorelli, in the Uffizi at Florence, or else he is busy with his carpenter-work in the background, as in the pensive and

THE HOLY FAMILY — MURILLO

A part of the painting in the National Gallery, London

graceful sketch by Luc Olivier Merson. The truth of these pictures lies in their recognition of the fact that a child's earliest knowledge usually comes from its mother. She teaches the alphabet, not only of life, but also of learning. The Talmud says, "An understanding of the law may be looked for in those who have drawn it in at their mother's breast."

But have we indeed remembered all the influences which entered into the childhood of Christ when we have spoken of parental love and natural pleasures and youthful playmates and earnest studies? I think not. For surely there is something higher and holier than all these which comes into the child-life silently and invisibly, consecrating it, and making it breathe of heaven. It is of this that Wordsworth speaks when he says to a child,

> "Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year,
> And worshipp'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
> God being with thee when we know it not."

It is this that is bestowed in special measure upon the gentlest of children, so that they become

> "God's apostles, day by day
> Sent forth to preach of love, and hope, and peace."

It is this that the gospel tells us was not given unto Christ by measure, but abundantly. It is this that St. Luke names when he says of the Holy Child, "and the grace of God was upon him."

Murillo's famous "Holy Family" in the National Gallery at London realizes this thought. The picture

is in his latest manner, tender, vapourous, full of diffused radiance, like the dream of a picture, or the picture of a dream. It was painted when Murillo was an old man, and had gone down to Cadiz to die; but the glory of immortal youth rests upon it. The Child Jesus stands upon a slight eminence. Mary and Joseph kneel on each side of Him, not worshipping, but with looks of reverential love which remind us that all through the childhood of Christ they must have remembered the wondrous secret of the divine promise concerning Him. The Child looks upward with a happy face, and the light flows around Him in a soft flood. He is praying without words. He is seeing the invisible. But as we follow his glance, we see above Him in the picture the poising wings of the sacred Dove, and higher still the venerable face which painters use as the symbol of the Almighty. What is this, then, but a formal picture of the Trinity, in which the descending Spirit of all grace is the connecting link between the Father and the Son? Yes, that was the old painter's theology, and it is mine. But when words fail to interpret the mystery of it, and forms and colours do but dimly shadow its meaning, I turn the eyes of my heart towards the Christ-child, who holds fast to the hands of human love and acknowledges its claim upon Him, even while He feels that He came forth from God and the sense of union with his Heavenly Father dawns within Him. Here is the solution of the secret, not in words, but in a life that, though it is still veiled in childish weakness, draws God down to humanity and lifts humanity up towards God.

IV

The Finding of Christ in the Temple is the culmination of his childhood. If our reading of the gospel story thus far has been true, we must interpret this incident in harmony with it. We feel, therefore, that art was astray in its earlier reading of "Christ among the Doctors." All the artists, from the time when they first began to treat the subject, which was certainly as early as the date of the mosaics in Santa Maria Maggiore at Rome, placed Jesus in an elevated position, and represented Him as instructing the Rabbis. Thus in Ghiberti's wonderfully spirited relief on the northern doors of the Baptistery at Florence, the Child is seated upon an actual throne, while the doctors are grouped at his feet. Taddeo Gaddi, in his fresco in the Lower Church at Assisi, has the doctors symmetrically arranged in rows facing each other, six on each side, and the Child sits in the centre, with a roll of parchment in his left hand, and his right solemnly raised as if commanding silence. A painting of some power, by Domenico Passignano, in the Church of San Francesco, at Borgo di San Sepolcro, shows a group of four large figures in the foreground; one old man leans his gray head forward as if listening eagerly, a younger man with an open book on his lap bends back as if surprised, while a friend standing near stoops down over his shoulder and points to the book, bidding him "search the Scriptures." Beyond these men are quite a company of doctors, turning over their books as if puzzled, and a con-

siderable number of spectators. The Child, dressed in white with a blue robe, stands on a raised daïs in front of a bishop's chair, and lifts his hand with the gesture of an orator.

The little picture by Duccio di Boninsegna, a part of the famous altar-piece in the cathedral at Sienna, illustrates the spirit in which this subject was treated by the old masters. Duccio was one of the great men of the thirteenth century who awakened art in Italy after its long Byzantine sleep. He is worthy of a place near Giotto in the history of painting, for though his works shared the limitations of his age, and his ignorance of anatomy and perspective hampered his powers of expression, his thought was deep and his feeling sincere, and he was the founder of the important Siennese school, whose joyous and secluded course culminated in the poetic fertility of Sodoma. This panel represents the Christ-child as seated in solemn dignity on a raised platform under the frescoed arches of the Temple. Below Him are six doctors of the law, two of whom are pulling at their gray beards in perplexity, Joseph and Mary have just entered at the left, and are stretching out their hands in wonder and calling to the Child. It is all very reverent and unaffected and true to the painter's idea; but this idea is hardly true to the gospel narrative. For St. Luke makes us feel that Jesus appeared in the Temple not as a teacher but as a learner, one who was preparing for his life-work by coming into close contact with the religious life of the people whom He was to deliver from the yoke of the law and lead into the true rest of souls. What could be more

CHRIST AMONG THE DOCTORS — DUCCIO

From the panel in the Opera del Duomo, Sienna

natural than that He should desire to learn what the masters in Israel were teaching to the folk? Was it any derogation from the dignity of his mission that He should seek them and question them eagerly concerning their doctrine of God and righteousness and the way of peace? How could He bring new life and light, a better doctrine, a purer faith, unless He had sounded and proved the emptiness of those orthodox traditions which had made the Divine Word of none effect in Israel? It was as a seeker, a questioner, that He tarried among the doctors in the Temple precincts.

But questions from a child are often messages from God. And questions from such a child as Jesus must have been like illuminations piercing through the dry and flimsy web of Rabbinic subtleties. It was at this that the listeners wondered, not with the hostile surprise which would be excited by the sight of a boy of twelve teaching his elders, but with a pleasant wonder at the simplicity, the directness, the searching intelligence of his inquiries, and the discretion of his replies.

This conception of "Christ among the Doctors" has been expressed in modern art by two most admirable pictures, significant in the deepest sense of the intense interest which the best minds of this century have taken in the real life of Christ. One of them is Mr. Holman Hunt's brilliant painting of "The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple." The other is the picture by Prof. Heinrich Hofmann at Dresden. It is not entirely free from a touch of academic formality. One can feel the sense of effort and the influence of conventional types in the attempt to render the heads of a stern

Pharisee, a scornful Sadducee, a keen philosopher, a mild old Rabbi, and an earnest seeker after truth, in the five men who are grouped around the young Jesus. But the Divine Child is a supremely lovely figure. Clad in a simple white tunic, He rests one hand upon a reader's desk, and with the other He points to a passage in the open book as if asking for a solution of its meaning which shall reveal its living power. He lifts his dark, luminous eyes to the face of one of the doctors with the earnest, searching look of one who already knows that the word of God is the food of the soul. He feels that He is in his Father's House, but He is there as a child, to learn his Father's will. And it is in this spirit that He goes down again to the home in Nazareth, and lives there in subjection to his parents, and growing in favour with God and man.

V

There is surely a vital truth for our own lives to be gathered from this interpretation of the childhood of Jesus. It gives us a deeper sense of the sacredness and the power of the home.

The perfect manhood of Him whom all Christendom adores as the Son of God was matured and moulded in the tender shelter of the home. It was there that He felt the influences of truth and grace. To that source we may trace some of the noblest qualities of his human character. And yet, if there is anything which

THE BOY JESUS IN THE TEMPLE —Hofman

Christendom appears to be in danger of losing, it is the possibility of such a home as that in which Jesus grew to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

Is it not true?

> "The world is too much with us, late and soon,
> Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers."

The false and cruel conditions of industrial competition, and the morbid overgrowth of great cities where human lives are crowded together to the point of physical and moral suffocation, have raised an enormous barrier between great masses of mankind and the home which their natural instincts desire and seek. The favoured classes, on the other hand, are too much alienated by false standards of happiness, by the mania of publicity, by the insane rivalries of wealth, to keep their reverence for the pure and lovely ideals of domestic life. A new aristocracy is formed which lives in mammoth hotels, and a new democracy which exists in gigantic tenements. Public amusements increase in splendour and frequency, but private joys grow rare and difficult, and even the capacity for them seems to be withering, at least in the two extremes of human society where the home wears a vanishing aspect.

And yet—so runs my simple and grateful creed—this appearance is only transient and superficial. Deep in the heart of humanity lies the domestic passion, which will survive the mistakes of a civilization not yet fully enlightened, and prove the truth of the saying: "Before the fall, Paradise was man's home; since the

fall, home has been his Paradise." The great silent classes of mankind who stand between the extremes, not yet spoiled by luxury and just beginning to awake to an active compassion for the sorrows of the homeless multitude, cherish the ideal of the home, the resting-place of love, the nursery of innocent childhood, the seed-plot of the manly virtues, defended even in the lowliest cottage against all rude intrusions and desecrating powers, and ruled by

"Pure religion, breathing household laws."

To be loyal to this ideal, to realize it in their own lives and help to make it possible for others, is indeed the noblest and the most useful service that men and women can render to the age. For, after all, it is only from such quiet and holy homes as that in which the child Jesus lived at Nazareth that the children of the future can come, who shall feel, as manhood dawns, that they must be about their Father's business, and follow the Christ, the King, to the serene and bloodless triumph of his kingdom of childlike faith, and hope, and love for all mankind.

THE END

MILLS COLLEGE LIBRARY

THIS BOOK DUE ON THE LAST DATE
STAMPED BELOW

Books not returned on time are subject to
a fine of 10c per volume per day.

DEC 1 4 '50
DEC 1 2 '68
FACULTY
MAY 15 '74
DEC 1 3 1991

MILLS COLLEGE LIBRARY

BNF The Christ-child in art; a study o
755 V248c Van Dyke, [illegible]hry, 185

3 3086 00090 1371

ART DEPARTMENT

755 13969 V248c